

Isaiah 35:3-6

Luke 10:1-9

Luke 10 verse 1

The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them on ahead in pairs.

I don't know about you but when I think of disciples I automatically think of the 12

One of my failings has always been in having difficulty in seeing the bigger picture - I bet as a child I rarely asked the question why? I tend to accept things at face value. I'm not saying this is right and I have to say, sometimes this has got me into trouble, because I've been known to make decisions without taking the time to investigate further. Some would call it impulsive I think it's really just short sighted.

So suddenly thinking, hang on seventy-two disciples, caused me to reflect on how sometimes we maybe don't look any further than the group of people we regularly worship with.

It can feel a bit lonely, a bit on the outside as Christians; especially if our family or close circle are not believers. Maybe, particularly, at this time, when it appears that some aspects of the history of some of our church leaders is apparently being shown up to be divorced completely from the teachings of Jesus.

We mustn't forget all the other disciples who we do not necessarily come into contact with who are also seeking the work of the Holy Spirit to help them share the Good News of Jesus and the hope of good overcoming bad.

It's comfortable to think being a Christian is enough in itself and that by living a life guided by Christian values we will eventually show the world that God's truth is the only way.

No need to put ourselves in a place where we can be challenged.

However, to make a difference we need to be challenged. and when we are challenged, we need the courage to stand firm when it's easier just to keep quiet.

Luke records how Jesus gives a warning in verse 3;
Go now, and remember that I am sending you out as lambs among wolves.

How does that make you feel?

A bit afraid?

When we are afraid, we tend to draw back; well, I do anyway, I personally hate challenge!

And I freely admit that by myself I would be a very poor witness. Could this be why Jesus sends the 72 out in pairs; that is 2 groups of 36 maybe.

It almost feels like an army preparing for battle doesn't it?

And to be fair, I think it is – not a battle of violence or even a battle of words but a commitment to remind people of how facing aggression with love and gentleness always leads to a better outcome eventually.

And facing aggression with love and gentleness is much more difficult than returning same for same.

These disciples were being sent out to find and connect with people who were open to hearing the Gospel message.

The first line of approach was to give God's blessing; a hope for peace.

This would not have been easy then, as most of Jesus' contemporaries were not looking for peace – they were looking for war – a war that would bring victory over the Samaritans and the hated Romans. This is how they saw God's glory being revealed. A victorious war.

And it's not easy now is it?

With all the negative historical news surrounding the Church of England it's not surprising the world is in danger of losing respect for the church, even, in some cases, I would say becoming hostile.

A letter from The Archbishops of Canterbury and York regarding the report recently released, by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, states: We are truly sorry for the shameful way the Church has acted and we state our commitment to listen, to learn and to act ..

We are truly sorry for the shameful way the Church has acted.

Of course, it's not just the Church of England, but the Church of England will stir up the most interest because we are still the established church in this country and the Queen is legally the head.

Is it any wonder some of *our* contemporaries are looking for war with the Church - not peace.

So it's not an easy call to follow at the moment – to go out and bring in the harvest as the 72 were being directed.

We must be prepared and spiritually fit for what is happening; and for that we too must feel the shame.

We have to agree with the report and be ashamed of the historical abuse... but of course it is not the church of Jesus that is responsible for what has happened and maybe is still happening. The responsibility must be with and remain with the individuals who forgot what they were supposed to be doing, who forgot they had been privileged to represent the church that Jesus left on earth, and they must pay the price.

Is this what happens when you go it alone?

We were never meant to fulfil our call on our own.
We need each other !!

Matthew 18:15-18 tells us Jesus taught us to correct one another.
in Hebrews 3:13 we are told to “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

In other words, we need to keep in contact with each other, to talk to each other to share how we are seeing God at work in the world.
we are meant to encourage each other, to pray together – never to go it alone.

This is why Jesus left the church for us.

He is the cornerstone, without relying on his strength, his teaching, his example we may find ourselves in danger of going it alone. This is a real danger, particularly now, in this time of isolation and the unknown. It is difficult to see how we are meant to reap the harvest at the moment.

We must remember that the church that Jesus left for us was never intended to be a particular building – the church Jesus left is us. It’s true that we need somewhere to meet in order to be together and we are fortunate that we have been blessed with the church buildings at Christ Church and St. John’s, which in normal times are beautiful places to invite people to, but let’s not forget that **we** are the church, wherever we are.

We need to keep in contact with each other in order to remain strong and dependant on Him, even in times of isolation, and its’ so easy to do that. Zoom – text – phone -email – card in the post. It has never been easier to keep in touch and by doing this we are able remain strong and true and able to go out into the world as “ lambs among wolves “ reacting to criticism, doubt, disbelief with gentleness and love in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in each one of us.

We find strength in unity, together we can speak out against evil, together we can overcome the wrongdoing of the world, together we can reap a harvest and look forward to the promise of restoration that comes from Isaiah 35;

“With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees. Say to those who are afraid, “Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to save you.””

Because - This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.