

## **Sermon for the First Sunday after Trinity 2020**

**Matthew 9.35 – 10.8**

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In the press and across the internet at the moment we're hearing so much about what an extraordinary time we're living in.

The weather has been commented upon widely.

The Met office reported that "It has been the sunniest spring on record for the UK and all the home nations and the driest May on record in England".

The 'Black lives matter' campaign has hit the headlines and we're witnessing a real upsurge in protests against racism and discrimination of all kinds.

The corona virus crisis has turned our lives upside down and we're certainly not living the lives we were just a few months ago.

And yet, by contrast, here in church we now find ourselves in Ordinary Time.

The 50 days of Easter are over and past.

The feast of the Holy Trinity, climax of all our festivals, is behind us.

Our liturgical colour reverts to default mode: green, the colour of growth.

And so it remains for the next 20 Sundays, all through the summer and on into the autumn.

These next 20 Sundays are the time for us to make sense of the events of our redemption which we have lived through these past three months, and allow the Holy Spirit to grow in us.

It is through observing these continuous Sundays after Trinity, called Ordinary Time that we are reminded that we cannot always live on the spiritual heights and nor will we ever remain in the lows of lockdown life but must make sense of our lives in the everyday.

This is real life.

Throughout this green season we follow this year the Gospel of St Matthew.

The lectionary has divided it up into convenient passages so that we will complete it in time for Advent and today we pick up St Matthew's gospel not quite half way through, at the end of Chapter 9.

St Matthew, like all the Gospel writers, has his own angle on the Jesus story, and I think that his way of writing the Gospel may have something to say to us in our current situation.

He was a Jew who wrote his Gospel for a Jewish audience, specifically the young Christian Jewish communities of Jerusalem.

This is doubtless why his Gospel is so full of references to Jesus' fulfilling Old Testament prophecies; and why Matthew seeks to present Jesus as the new Moses.

But one of the interesting features of Matthew's gospel is how he describes Jesus.

Unlike the other gospels, we find Jesus is quite often angry.

Matthew's Jesus is angry with the Scribes and Pharisees, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites."

Jesus berates them for their insistence on minute observance of the Law.

At one point when he tells the parable of the wedding banquet, he tells of the king being enraged, sending his troops and burning their city.

What can be the reason for the strength of Matthew's feelings, Jew though he was, about the Jewish authorities of his time?

Biblical scholars have combed his gospel for clues about when it was written and why he wrote it this way and many have concluded that Matthew's task is to write a gospel which will help his Jewish community of Christians come to terms with their current situation which was certainly not 'ordinary' but was a time of great upheaval and change.

A time of turmoil and unrest.

Violence and oppression.

So perhaps with all this in mind we will find the wisdom offered in this gospel very helpful in the next few months.

In today's reading we hear how Jesus taught in the synagogues, proclaimed the good news of the kingdom and cured every disease and sickness.

When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

When Jesus meets with people he observes their need: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

Jesus responds to the need by calling the twelve disciples and giving them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.

Then he sends them out with instructions.

And this is really interesting.

He says "Go nowhere among the gentiles. Enter no town of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

This is an interesting approach to mission.

Rather than going out to other groups, other races, look at your own tribe first.

Look at yourselves and those you associate with.

We are urged to look at our own family.

Our own friends.

Our own city.

What do we need to hear from the gospel message today?

He then tells them to proclaim the good news “The kingdom of heaven has come near” – and not just in words but also in deeds: cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.”

There is need for healing, love, care and compassion everywhere.

We don't always have to look far to find someone in need.

And finally he reminds them of their relationship with God: you received without payment; give without payment.

How different this is from the way the world usually works where people demand what is theirs and you only get what you can pay for.

One of the things the corona virus crisis has given us is a new opportunity to stop and think more about those who don't have what we take for granted.

Those who rely on foodbanks and school meals to feed their families.

Let's hope those lessons do not fade from our memories too soon.

The good news is that God's grace is free.

The free grace of God comes to set the prisoners free.

St Matthew's gospel goes on, as we shall discover, to show that the good news comes not just in the words which those twelve disciples proclaimed so long ago.

The good news actually has come in the person of Jesus Christ.

And later in the gospel we shall hear again how he shared himself with his disciples in bread and wine,

we shall follow again his passion, crucifixion and terrible death.

we shall encounter him again in his risen life, as we do today.

We know in our hearts that, alongside the shadows of terrible news, the good news is not old news.

It is not fake news.

It is not irrelevant because we're living in times of upheaval, uncertainty and change.

It is the good news that lives on for today, tomorrow and for eternity

Amen.