

Readers licensing : Luke 10:1-12 : 2020 October 3

There aren't quite 70 of you here today being sent out as Readers, but you are joining a community of those already licensed that's that kind of size - a bit bigger actually, and this gospel reading has much to say to us all about the kind of ministry that you are about to step into.

Before we look at the story though, let me first say thank you; to all those who have been involved in discerning and training these 6 wonderful people; to all of you who have prayed for them, supported them, brought them tea while they struggled through assignments and essays, encouraged, challenged and loved them so that they can be at this moment now. Thank you especially to you, the families of our new Readers, who have put up with their busyness, absences and - I assume - the odd grumpy moment.

And thank you to each one of you; Debbie, Matt, Penny, Sandy, Roy and Debbie. For your 'yes' to God's 'yes'.

To Luke, chapter 10 and this wonderful story of Jesus' expanding mission. It's a good reading for a day like today, laying out as it does, a pattern for mission and ministry that we would do well to hear and take deep into ourselves. It's a story for you and for your new ministry; this story which first unfolded on the dusty roads of Galilee, and which still speaks God's presence and power to us, here in this Cathedral so many years later.

In fact one organisation - Partnership for Missional Church, who have a wonderful approach to enabling churches to move into mission, bases everything they do with church communities on praying with this passage every time they meet for 3 years. There's that much in it!

But we haven't got 3 years, so alongside whatever you hear the Lord saying through these words this morning, I want to pull out three invitations or calls, and to lay them before you, as you set off on your new ministry.

Here's the first:

"After this, the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go."

Yours is a ministry of partnership. Partnership with Jesus in the work of the kingdom and partnership with his fellow workers in the kingdom. It is very easy, in ministry, to think that it's all on you; that building the kingdom and growing the church will depend on how good your sermon is, the brilliance of your kids group input or the creativity of the new worship service you're leading - and of course you will want to do everything to the best of your ability. But let this story remind you that everything you do is with people and communities to which Jesus has already been and intends to go to again.

A wise old tutor at my Theological College used to say that all ministers should have these words written somewhere where they will be seen every day - *There is a Saviour. Thank God it's not you.*

Your task is not to build the kingdom in your own strength, it is to seek Jesus in all the places that he has already been, and to join in with what he is already doing. Because there is a Saviour. And, thank God, it's not you.

And your ministry is not only in partnership with Jesus. Like the seventy, you are also sent out to work alongside others. With the clergy of your parishes, with lay leaders, PCC's, ministry teams and many others. Your ministry, like that of every minister, must only ever be done in partnership with others who are also sent out where Jesus intends to go and where he has already been.

So invest in your relationship with Jesus, so you can know where he is calling you on; and invest in your relationship with those you minister with. Do nothing on your own.

Second, notice how, in this story, the seventy are not sent from a particular place, nor are they told to come back anywhere specific. It is from Jesus that they go and to him that they return. There is a beautiful flow in that; from Jesus to the world, where he intends to go, and from the world where he is, back to him. From Jesus, to Jesus

Your ministry is also to travel from Jesus and back to him.

The best definition of church that I know comes from Rowan Williams. He said - '*church is what happens when people meet Jesus*'. When people encounter this man of peace and beauty, of truth and grace; when they find their lives turned upside down by him; healed, saved, empowered - when that happens we have to find others who have also met him - and that's church. Those who have met Jesus. Together.

And your specific call as Readers is to live in that flow. To nurture that flow. From Jesus in church communities where his people gather, to Jesus in the world where he is at work, and back to Jesus in church, and out to the world. From one to the other and back. A flow, a movement of Monday to Sunday faith, introducing church to the world and the world to church.

Imogen Clout, who's the head of the national Readers team said to me recently that she thinks the specific ministry of a Reader is to be equally called to work in the world and work in the church. Equally to both. To be equally rooted in Jesus presence in the church community and in Jesus action in the world, and to move freely between them.

Do nothing on your own; Move freely between Jesus in church and Jesus in the world.

Third. Jesus said "*Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick and say 'the kingdom of God has come near to you'*".

If your call is to move between church and world, and to introduce them to each other, then a key skill for you will be the art of story telling, the art of shaping imaginations, the art of showing those you meet where Jesus is at work in their lives.

You are to go about your daily life looking for signs of the kingdom, telling people, in ways that make sense that 'the kingdom of God has come near'; that God's presence is available, that healing and comfort are at hand, that there are satisfying answers to the great questions of life; that they are loved.

And then you're to return to your church communities and to tell them what you have found, to tell stories of the kingdom so that the whole community becomes bolder and more faithful in doing the same.

Church, after all, does not mean an hour on Sunday. We gather for an hour on Sunday in order to go out into the world to God's praise and glory, as living sacrifices and as labourers in the vineyard. And you, called as you are equally to work in church and to work in the world, are to help people step into that vision. Your invitation to the church is to step courageously and faithfully into an everyday faith.

Do nothing on your own : Move freely between Jesus in church and Jesus in the world : Call your churches into an everyday faith.

"After this, the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go."

You have been appointed. Now, in Jesus' name and for his kingdom glory, you are sent.

Amen