

Dear friends,

Today we hear of Jesus sending his disciples out to bring good news and healing to the lost sheep of Israel. He instructs them how to go, what to take – and how to respond to welcome[or unwelcome] behaviour. They are not to take much so that they can rely on the kindness of strangers. So we need to explore how sharing the good news with others is a key part of faith – and how we can learn to do so, even when it feels challenging. Every blessing to each of you. Margaret.

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**Call to worship:**

The kingdom of heaven is near – come, let us explore it together.

God the healer, the friend, is calling – Proclaim the good news.

People find wholeness, people find healing – the kingdom of heaven is near.

Lord, help us to find you in the unexpected.

Enable us to listen to your call and fill us with your power.

Shake us out of complacency – help us to see where you want us to be, and give us the courage to follow your lead. Amen.

Jesus called the disciples and gave them a job – gave them authority to carry it out – took them out of their comfort zone.

Lord God, we are here before you – we are not on our own for your Holy Spirit is with us.

Make us ready to follow you, stepping out in faith, going wherever you lead us. Amen.

**The words to ‘Forth in thy name’ written by Charles Wesley [1707-1788] Singing the Faith 550**

1 Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go, my daily labour to pursue.

thee, only thee, resolved to know in all I think, or speak, or do.

2 The task thy wisdom has assigned O let me cheerfully fulfil,  
in all my works thy presence find, and prove thy good and perfect will.

3 Thee may I set at my right hand, whose eyes my inmost substance see,  
and labour on at thy command and offer all my works to thee.

4 Give me to bear thy easy yoke, and every moment watch and pray,  
And still to things eternal look, and hasten to thy glorious day.

5 For thee delightfully employ whate’er thy bounteous grace has given,  
and run my course with even joy and closely walk with thee to heaven.

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, you had compassion on the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. We, too, know that feeling.

We bow before you now, silently reflecting on all you mean to us – all that you are to, glorious shepherd.

We come to you, O God, to worship and adore. Amen.

Lord, sometimes we cling tightly to familiar things - too frightened to listen to your call to move forward or to trust that you will give us the strength that we need.

Forgive us and help us to trust you more. Amen.

The God who cared for the lost sheep of Israel cares for us and will pick us up from our wretchedness and bring us back into his loving arms.

The God who encourages us to step out in faith longs for us to take the risk of trusting him with our lives.

We go forth knowing we are cleansed from all our sin, ready to start anew in his marvellous life. Amen.

Lord, as we read the names of your disciples, chosen by you, we thank you because suddenly they become more real to us – real people who stepped out of their comfort zone for you – real examples for us. [*spend a quiet moment focusing on your own name, thanking God for his plans for you. Amen.*]

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**Matthew 9: 35 – 10: 8 – taken from The New Testament – A New Translation by William Barclay. Copyright William Barclay 1968**

Jesus made a tour of all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds he was heart-sorry for them, for they were bewildered and dejected, like sheep who had no shepherd. ‘There is a rich harvest,’ he said to the disciples, ‘but there are few workers. So you must pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers to gather in his harvest.’

Jesus summoned the twelve disciples and gave them such authority over unclean spirits that they were able to eject them, and to cure every disease and every sickness.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon [who is called Peter], and his brother Andrew; James, Zebedee’s son, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector; James, Alphaeus’ son, and Thaddeus; Simon, the Nationalist, and Judas Iscariot, the man who betrayed him.

Jesus sent out these twelve, and these were his marching orders to them: ‘You must not go off of any road that leads to Gentile territory; you must not go into any Samaritan town; it is rather to the sheep of Israel who have gone lost that you must go. As you go, make this proclamation:’ The Kingdom of Heaven is almost here’. Cure the sick, raise the dead to life, cleanse the lepers, eject the demons. You paid nothing to get, accept nothing to give.’

*And Jesus went on to say:* ‘Do not lay in a stock of gold or silver or copper coins in your money-belts. Do not take a beggar’s knapsack for the road, nor two shirts, nor shoes, nor a staff. The workman deserves his keep. Whenever you enter a town or village, look for someone who deserves the presence of my messengers, and stay there till you leave it. When you go into a house, give your greeting to it. If the house deserves it, let your prayer for God’s blessing rest upon it. If the house deserves it, let your prayer for God’s blessing rest upon it. If it does not deserve it, let your

prayer for God's blessing return to you. If anyone refuses a welcome or a hearing, as you leave that house or town, shake the last speck of its dust from your feet, as if you were leaving a heathen town. I tell you truly, it will be easier for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than for that town. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. You must therefore show yourselves to be wise as serpents and as pure as doves. You must be constantly on your guard.'

**Comment:**

Jesus' disciples have accompanied him and seen all that he does. Did they realise they were being trained for independent ministry? Jesus has built a team who can replicate his mission and increase its impact, and he commissions the twelve disciples by sharing the authority he has won over hostile spirits. This delegated authority gives them the right to act on his behalf in supporting the goals of his mission, confronting all that brought suffering to these marginalised communities. In commissioning them, Jesus sets out his understanding of mission in a section of teaching. For the moment, he limits their work to the Jews, identified again as 'lost sheep'. This restriction lifts after the resurrection, and the disciples are instructed to 'make disciples of all nations.' They announce good news that the kingdom of heaven is near, as Jesus has taught them to pray. This is shown by the healing that the disciples can now offer: a proof of the presence of God. Jesus commands them emphatically to cure, raise, cleans, cast out and makes it clear that this happens through the Holy Spirit at work in them – a freely given gift. This is why Jesus tells them that they may not accept any money for their work – they must honour the generosity of God.

**Prayer:**

We sing to the Lord and worship with joy; for we never forget that the Lord is God.

God made us and to God we belong; we are God's people, we are God's flock.

We gather with each other to give thanks to God, we come to him with praise and thanksgiving in our hearts.

For the Lord is good, the Lord's love is eternal, and the Lord's faithfulness lasts for ever.

God's story has led us, inspired us and transformed us, called us, acknowledged us, loved and redeemed us.

Almighty God, our voices sing your praise, our hearts offer our thankfulness. Amen.

**Close:**

Lord, you send us out in your name – you give us your authority – you give us your power.

Give us the courage to go where you send us.

Go ahead to lead and to guide. Follow behind to encourage and help.

Lord, you send us out – and, gladly, we go forth in your name. Amen.

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