

I sit down to watch the news on the television, or to read the newspaper, it is with the intention of becoming better informed. But it sometimes has the effect of inducing a feeling of helplessness before the pressing crises of the world. Some of you perhaps have a similar reaction.

One of the things that is often said from pulpits is that we are all involved in Christ's mission of renewing the world, of bringing hatred and injustice to an end, and of establishing God's reign of love and peace. But in the face of the real problems of the world we often feel that our efforts are like spitting in the ocean.

Does what we do really make any difference? In the cosmic struggle between the love of Christ and the tides of evil, are our efforts at faithfulness and mission of any significance at all? Does God see us as important players on the team?

A few details about the reading from Luke are perhaps worth noting. They help us to understand what it meant for the people it was first written for, and can therefore help us see what it can mean for us.

- Firstly, the number of disciples Jesus appoints and sends out. Our translation says 72 others say 70. In the book of Genesis, there is a table of nations in chapter ten. In the Hebrew Bible there are 70 nations in it, but in the Greek translation that was commonly used in the first century, there was 72. The message is the worldwide scope of the harvest into which Jesus sends the labourers.

- Now, the equipment they were or weren't to take with them. No purse, no bag, no sandals, no chatting with friends along the road. The message here is one of urgency. It is backed up by the harvest imagery. Jesus is saying, "This is urgent, you've got a task to do, no messing around, no time for trying to sort out your baggage limits, no time for shopping, for social chats along the road. Go to it. The Kingdom of God is near, now is the time to respond."

But notice something else. It is the same message for those who respond and for those who don't. To those who welcome you, say "The kingdom of God has come near to you." To those who refuse to welcome you, say "Yet know this, the kingdom of God has come near." Why? Because if the kingdom of God has come near, then you stand judged by your own response. Either you jumped on the bandwagon when it came your way or you didn't. You heard the message of love and acceptance. You saw the signs of healing and welcome. You made your choice when you had your opportunity. The kingdom of God has come near. Enough said.

The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Many people are feeling that the way their lives are going nowhere. The message of the gospel is that things can be made new. But where are the messengers? Many people are feeling that they are struggling to stay afloat and keep their heads up. The message of the gospel is that you can be saved. But where are the messengers? Many people feel trapped in cycles of evil and abuse that humiliate and degrade them. The message of the gospel is that you can be set free. But where are the messengers? .

You are called by Jesus Christ to be his labourers out there in the harvest field. You don't need any particular expertise or training to be able to love other people and show to others the welcome and acceptance and mercy that God has shown you. You don't need a uni degree to be able to talk about what has happened to you and how it is bringing healing and hope into your life. And it doesn't take any great prophetic gift to be able to recognise people who reckon there is something stuffed up about their lives.

You are the people that Christ is sending out, like lambs among wolves to share the peace of Christ, to eat and drink with people, to respond in mercy to sickness and brokenness, and to talk about the nearness of God and of God's reign in the world. That is Christ's commission to the whole church. You are all ministers and priests. You are a royal priesthood, it says. You will minister in my name to

the ends of the earth.

In the great arena of the world, when the our team of love and life and hope takes on the forces of evil and war and greed, you are the people who are supposed to take the field. Kick the goals. Score the tries, serve the aces. I have to do my best as coach and then let you take to the field and do it. You are the ministers of Christ, the light of the world, a sign of the kingdom.

Now I reckon that a lot of the times that we want to retreat back into the church it is because we can't see any significance in what we manage to do in the world. We feel so inadequate as ministers of Christ, because the harvest is so large and our little patch seems a very little return for a lot of effort. Sure we might help in a kids club, but the numbers of disaffected and delinquent kids don't seem to get any less. Sure we might see the occasional bloke who was locked into systems of greed and ambition and stress and heart attack set free and become a healthier more balanced generous creative human being. But average work hours are still rising and the rates of suicide and are still rising. Sure Amnesty International continues to campaign on so many issues but there is still a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which is blockaded, which amounts to collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza. We're out there, we're doing our best, but it all seems so insignificant.

But what does Jesus say when they report back. "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

A Verse that could mean two things

Firstly warning against pride. Legend has that Satan was the chief of angels in heaven and was cast out of heaven when he appeared to be boastful and proud of his own accomplishments.

But it could well mean that Jesus is saying that forces of evil and darkness are defeated have been defeated but still keep at it.

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

What, all I did was turn up to rattle a can for Morpeth contact.

What, all I did was write to the paper about the need to keep up the fight to see polio eradicated.

What, all I did was turn to up at the foodbank once a week.

What, all I did was to join the campaign to stop world wide violence against women

What, all I did was sign up for a sponsored walk to raise funds for breast cancer charity.

What, all I did was put a few groceries in the box for the refugees and asylum seekers.

I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

It might all seem very mundane when you're one of the seventy sent out with no sandals to say "Peace to this house." But Jesus can see the whole game plan. Jesus sees the demonic structures that begin to topple and fall as we do our little bit of chipping away at the bottom.

The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. May the Lord of the harvest send out labourers into his harvest.

Listen I have given you authority, so that you can walk on snakes and scorpions and overcome all the power of the enemy

The kingdom of God has come near, and you might not be able to see the full significance of your little part of it, but through you and many others God's tide of love and truth is pushing back the currents of corruption wrongness and brutality. Your little drop in the ocean might not seem like much, but when the tide turns every drop is in it together and nothing can stand in your way.