

"You need to get out more"

Sunday 21 June 2009

Karen Senior

Readings:

Matthew 10: 1-16

Psalm 37: 1-6

Acts 8: 1-8

Sermon

Have we got any James Bond fans here this morning?

That's a bit scary for me because I'm not really into Bond movies myself, so you probably know far more than I do.....

but even I know something about him.... Bond, James Bond, who orders his cocktails shaken not stirred, suave and brave, tall dark and Broshnan or in the Daniel Craig mode....Bond is a hero.

I reckon every boy imagines himself as James Bond ... and I suspect that not many of them stop just because they grow up.... even if they wouldn't want to admit their daydreams to their nearest and dearest who might have less generous imaginations!

Bond is brave and persevering. He has good ideas and he never has the experiences which are so familiar to real men (and women) when the computer crashes and the technology defeats them.

He is decisive and patriotic....there are children present so I won't go beyond saying that he's got what it takes to woo the ladies. He's strong, agile, multi-skilled, intelligent, witty, cultured and honest.....and every adventure begins with him being sent on a mission.

Bond is a man with a mission.

That is quite strange, because if I asked you what your mental image of a missionary is I suspect you might be more likely to imagine something like this.....OHT

Less Bond-like!

In the reading that Mike read from Matthew's gospel this morning we heard about Jesus sending the disciples out on a mission.

Brian was preaching last week and he talked about us all being disciples, because disciples are learners, or students, or apprentices, and although "lifelong learners" is a bit of a well used phrase in education at present, it is what all Christians are, and always have been, called to be.

In verse 1 of the reading we read that Jesus called the 12 disciples together and he gave them authority to work on his behalf.

In verse 2 we read "these are the names of the 12 apostles".

So are they disciples or are they apostles? Is there a difference or do the two words mean the same thing?

They don't actually.....disciple means learner, pupil, student, apprentice whereas apostle means one who is sent.

So the followers of Jesus are meant to be disciples AND apostles

Jesus' plan for disciples was that they should share his work spreading the message that "The Kingdom of God is near" - by preaching, and by healing people.

He gave them limits to this mission - they were only to visit the Jewish communities - not to go to people who weren't Jewish, or to the Samaritans (remember in Jesus' day "the Samaritans" weren't the kind listeners you spoke to when you reached the end of your resources - they were the despised nation the Jews lived alongside.)

That doesn't mean that Jesus wasn't interested in foreigners - we don't have to read much of the New Testament to see that he loved and respected ALL people whatever their ethnic background.

But this was the first mission the disciples were being sent on, maybe he didn't want to give them a task that looked totally impossible!

The church's mission isn't fundamentally any different now to what it was then. We are called to go out and tell people the message "The Kingdom of God is near" And in case you wonder - Jesus never intended it to be a threat - it is GOOD NEWS!!

This is the mission of the church, this is what we are here for, to bring the good news about who Jesus is to the people in our community.

Are we ready to do that? Will Morgan, Cameron and Emily be able to share in that?

We aren't all called to be preachers. We don't all pray for people and see them healed. But we are all sent out (apostles) with a mission - whether we *feel* like a James Bond or a Johnny English.

Our man with a mission often works alone. Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus' first disciples were sent out in twos.

Sometimes as Christians we can feel very alone, at home, or at school, or at work. You might know without a doubt that you are the only follower of Jesus who works in your office or shop.... and if that's tough, think of the children who are the only Christian in their class.

It isn't easy to stand out, and the words we use in Baptism recognise this - when the candidates for Baptism are signed with the cross Brian will say:

"Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified".

That is because it can be hard to admit that we are Christians. Perhaps we feel that as disciples/learners we are still in reception class and we are terrified of people asking us questions we might not be able to answer?

Perhaps it is because we desperately hope that if we are apostles – sent out – that we can be sent out somewhere very quiet and trouble free where no-one will notice us!

But after Brian's line "Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified", we all join in the words of encouragement to the candidates:

"Fight valiantly as a disciple of Christ against sin, the world and the devil, and remain faithful to Christ to the end of your life"

"Fight valiantly against" - you might think that sounds more like instructions for Mr Bond than for being a Christian in Tunbridge Wells.....! But it isn't always easy following Jesus.... there will be good times and tough times, but God is always faithful.

When Bond goes on a mission he is briefed, trained, resourced and supported. The 12 in our reading were briefed – by Jesus himself. They were trained by him too – that was the essence of their being disciples – they didn't learn from Jesus by having lessons and taking tests, they lived with him, they watched him, they followed him closely, and they tried to be like him.

That is the sort of discipleship we are called to as well. The brief is the same – Jesus repeated it at the final farewell to these guys when he left them to go back to his father. It's right at the very end of Matthew's gospel and he said:

"All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age."

Which means that what we are doing here this morning, baptising these children, is a part of that mission which the church was briefed for way back then.

So.... going back to the first mission from Matthew 10, how were they resourced and supported? No Bond gadgets here! Jesus told them not to take anything with them, no money, not even a change of clothes!

I read that with the disbelief of all too many women of my age..... as someone who rarely leaves the house without a handbag stuffed with useful clutter. I was extremely impressed at Josh and Morgan when they set off for their 6 weeks in Australia and New Zealand taking everything for the whole trip in backpacks they had to carry themselves!! But Josh and Morgan had excess baggage compared to these first disciples.

And I wonder why Jesus wouldn't even let them take a spare tunic, and I don't know the answer to that, but I guess it is something to do with them experiencing what it meant to totally trust in him.

Steve Burnett is here today, and earlier this year Steve had an experience of being sent by God on a specific mission. If you missed him telling us about that it's well worth hearing.

The impression I got from hearing Steve's story was that any of the *stuff* he had with you was as likely to be a barrier rather than a help when it came to just being with

people who have absolutely nothing? And that the best support he felt wasn't from his traveller's cheques but from the knowledge that lots of people here and in Tonbridge were praying for him. Is that a fair comment Steve?

Most of us aren't sent to the Philippines though. We'll be sent to work tomorrow or to school, and how does Jesus resource us for our mission? How are we supported in being sent out?

Again the answers to that are in the service sheet....and we have already said those bits. Turn back to the top of the second page if you would – to the presentation of the candidates.

We the congregation have already promised to welcome these three and to uphold them in their new life in Christ. Parents and Godparents have made additional promises - Lou and Elaine & Bryan have promised that with the help of God they will bring their children up within the church, they:

“will pray for them, draw them by example into the community of faith” – that's all of us here,

“that they will walk with them in the way of Christ, and that they will care for them and help them to take their place within the life and worship of Christ's church.”

When there are Baptisms here, they should always be a reminder to all of us who have been baptised, of our own Baptisms.

I don't remember my Baptism – I was only a baby. I remember the Baptisms of my sons – but they were babies and they won't remember them for themselves.

At our baptisms promises were made about turning to Christ as Saviour and Lord, and following his way. And if we were children then our parents and godparents made those promises. And to be utterly blunt about it I know that the people who made those promises on my behalf.... ooo such a long time ago now.... didn't all really mean what they promised.

I suppose in those days when many church services were in a language nobody spoke – and my godparents were asked:

Read from p267 of the BCP

it was not difficult to be unsure of what you might be promising!

So for those of us who were baptised from that era and can't remember it, the words today are much easier to get a grasp of. We have died to sin and risen to new life, we have turned to Christ as Saviour and Lord. And if like me you are unconvinced of the spiritual integrity of people who made those promises for you, the most important person in a baptism service is Jesus Christ, and he is always faithful.

But our mission, should we choose to accept it – and in baptism that is exactly what we are choosing, our mission is to accept our part in the mission of the church, and it can be difficult.

This morning's other Reading, which Vera read, was about Philip. That's the Philip who this church is named after!!

Philip who was one of the 12 named in Matthew's gospel. What happened to him in Acts was read first this morning but it actually happened about 7 years later than the mission in Matthew's gospel.

The new church in Jerusalem was under attack – a great persecution broke out and the Christians were scattered. Philip went to a city in Samaria – because this time the Mission wasn't limited to the Jews – now the good news of Jesus is for everyone EVEN the Samaritans!

Philip told people about Jesus and people paid attention to what he said, and there were miracles, and signs that God was at work - people were healed and there was great joy.

All of us who are baptised are commissioned to be part of God's work in his world through his church.

We have had the brief handed down through the generations, we can only go and share this good news if we know what it is we are sharing....We have been trained and we go on being trained, by seeing how Jesus lived and following his ways, and also by seeing how his followers live, and by helping each other.

We meet together in church to worship God, we also meet to go on learning together, to be equipped, to be empowered to grow.

We have opportunities to work together too....so I will embarrass both mums here and say that Lou is a regular helper at Energise, and Elaine is often found wielding the teapot at events where folk are welcomed to St Philip's, like the strawberry tea last week.

And that is all part of what we have signed up for at our Baptisms – taking our place in the life and worship of Christ's Church.

We need to get out more, as the service title reminds us. That's all of us – we are part of the church and the church has a Mission.

We have all been sent on the Mission Jesus Christ gives us, but we can only really fulfil that mission with the support and resources that meeting and learning together provide for us... then we will be able to shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father.

The church has a mission because God has a mission. He loved the world so much that he sent his son to live and die in it.