**Sermon: Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost 17th Oct 2021**

**St Luke the Evangelist and Martyr**

**Jeremiah 8:22-9.3, Ps 145:10-18, 2 Timothy 4:9-17a, Luke 10:1-9**

*The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.*

This past week the church has gathered for Synod. It’s an opportunity for the leadership of the church to bring major legislation before the house of clergy and the house of laity. This year’s Synod would be challenging. Hosted via the Internet it proved challenging.

As I reflect not only on my experience of Synod, but also on our experience as the Church here in Rosebud and McCrae, how we gather together to do the work of God’s Kingdom, how challenging that has been this year. Changing from online services to face to face or a combination of the two. Finding new ways to bring us together as the people of God, to celebrate the changing seasons of the Church year, grieving those we have lost, or who moved away. All of our lives have changed so much over the last year, over almost two years. I think it is worth taking time to name the challenges, to name what is difficult but also to name what has brought us joy and peace in a time of great change.

I wanted to sit in the Cathedral this year for Synod. I missed the gathering on Wednesday evening for prayer and worship around the Eucharist. Of gathering together, to say hello to colleagues, friends and others for whom I have not seen in a very long time. Likewise I imagine many of you are keen to be able to gather again in Church for much the same reasons. To meet with God around the Eucharist, to catch up with dear friends for whom it has not been easy to visit. To mourn those we have lost.

Jesus sent out seventy saying ‘*The kingdom of God has come near to you’.* The kingdom of God has come near to you. What strikes me is that Jesus is sending these people out. He says to them *Go!*  They were to take the message of the Kingdom of God with them wherever they went, into whatever village they visited. It was not going to be easy. Jesus says to them, *See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.* This is not an easy image. Wolves devour lambs. Those seventy disciples would know exactly what Jesus was driving at. They would not be off on an easy journey. It would not all go the way they wanted it too. There would be those who would reject the message of the kingdom of God. But on the other hand, there would be those who would accept.

In those towns and villages the disciples were welcomed and the message of God’s kingdom was received, they were to say to them, *The kingdom of God has come near to you.* Whereas for those towns and villages that rejected the message of the Kingdom of God, they were to shake the dust off their feet. In Luke’s telling the words are even stronger – *Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.* What bold words. What courage in the face of opposition.

*Peace to this house. The kingdom of God has come near.*

While you and I have not been able to join together in the church, for me and I hope you too, there has been a sense of God’s presence with you in the midst, in your homes, in your lives. Jesus word’s bring comfort, *Peace to this house, peace be to your house, to mine, to those around me.*

If we are completely honest with ourselves, there are real challenges that people are facing in the community. Some more than others. The reality that we haven’t been able to do what we normally do. Have the Op Shop open to assist those in our community, have the doors of the Church open for prayer, for Sunday and Wednesday Eucharist. To sit in one another’s presence. To meet for morning tea in the church. To gather with one another for meetings face to face. None of this has been easy.

*The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.*

Another challenge for the church, and by that I mean all churches, not just ours, is in the area of mission. How do churches consider what constitutes as mission during a lockdown? I know for one I have struggled with this. Many others have too. Again there is no easy answer either. This pandemic has in a way cut us off from doing the things we would just normally go about doing. Finding ways to connect with our community.

And so I have a request this morning. What do you do, when there is little option to do much else? I am calling us to pray. Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into the harvest. But that might sound strange to pray. Who is Lord of the Harvest? God is. We are asked to put our faith and trust in God. When the labourers are few. When at a time when it may feel like nothing much is happening. This is the time to pray.

The disciples were told to take no bag, no purse, no sandals, not to greet anyone along the way. They were to remain focussed on the task at hand. Their task was to bring the message of the good news of the Kingdom of God. They were to receive hospitality where it is was given. To bless those who received them. To bring healing to the sick, and not to refuse the food set before them. They were to be gracious to all.

In verse 17 of chapter 10 we discover that the seventy return with joy in their hearts. I am certain that when you and I return to church there will be great joy and I am sure that I will revel in that joy. But there is something that I will rejoice the more in. That we be a people of prayer who bring before our Lord who knows the challenges we are facing. That it is the Lord of the Harvest who has everything under control. What is two years in the sight of God? It is but a blink. Nevertheless pray, that although the labourers are few, that God will bring a harvest. What we think is impossible, is not impossible with God. I could name a million reasons why I would not pray that prayer, starting with my own doubt. I’m sure you could too.

Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Do you know what, wherever you or I go, we take the message of the Kingdom of God with us. We are called to be the messengers of the Gospel of Christ. To be living, vibrant, examples of God’s love to those around us. Having hearts that are gracious toward others. How do we do this when all our strength may be gone? We pray and ask God for strength and encouragement. For God is the Lord of the Harvest and you and I are called to pray to him for grace, for strength and encouragement, that in this time of lockdown God has been working away in the hearts of people in this area unbeknown to us. So that when we open our doors in due course, God will bring a harvest.

Let us pray….