

THE OUT-GOING CHURCH LUKE 10:1-16

What is the Church for? You might never have asked that question before. What is the Church for? What is its purpose? What is its reason for being? Here's one answer: "The Church is the only society on earth which exists for the benefit of those outside it." These words are attributed to Wm Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury 1942-4. Think about that for a moment while I tell you about my mother. My mother was a district nurse in the Clyde Valley during war time and afterwards. At that time, district nurses attended the birth of babies in their area; babies were mostly born at home! Years later, we'd be on the bus or in the street and she would say 'that's one of my babies!' I used to wonder what she meant at first, till it dawned on me, or she explained it to me, that these were people that she had helped to be born. They recognised her and her part in their life and they held her in high esteem for it, long after she had given up her nursing career. She counted it a great privilege, to be midwife helping new people come into the world.

I think that is what Wm Temple means, that the Church is there/here to be the midwife for people to come to new life in Jesus, to help people into a new quality of life in Jesus. JH Jowett was a Congregational minister in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; he went to the USA, then came back to be the minister of Westminster Chapel in London. He had a growing reputation as a preacher, and was quite famous! He was invited to preach at a certain service and the service was opened with prayer and the man praying said this: "O Lord, we thank You for our brother. Now blot him out! Reveal your glory to us in such blazing splendour that he shall be forgotten." That's not perhaps how you would think to welcome a visiting preacher, but Jowett called that prayer 'inspired'. The preacher's message is of such importance and glory that he or she cannot, indeed dare not, get in the way, but should open the way for people to see glory of God, to see the treasures of wonderful grace in Jesus. The Church is here to show people the wonderful goodness and greatness of Jesus.

This is not just about preachers! Luke chapter 10 tells us two ways in which the Church should be outgoing, not concerned for its own self, but concerned for others. That's what we're going to look at today and if you feel that we skate over some very important issues, then you have the chance to discuss them again a week on Wednesday at the Discovery Groups when the discussion will focus on the whole of Luke 10; even if you've not been before feel free to try it out! Two ways in which Church is to be out-going, concerned for other people: 1)in the story of Jesus sending 70/72 people into the villages of Galilee; 2)the parable of the Good Samaritan. Both of these, in different ways, challenge us about our attitudes to other people, especially today to those who are outside the Church and whom we might long to see come inside.

1)Jesus sends out 72 people – He had done something similar at the start of chapter 9, when He sent out the 12 disciples, but the stories are so similar that we will look at chapter 10. "*After this...*" (10:1) They were sent out ahead

of Jesus into the towns and villages of Galilee, the places Jesus was to visit, to tell people that He is coming and be ready! "*I am...*" (10:3) He warns them that this will be no easy task, yet they are to go graciously, not in a confrontational way, yet not to be naïve; their work will be dangerous in some ways because people will reject them. So they are to go in spirit of dependence, depending on God and on the hospitality of the people they meet. "*The harvest...*" (10:2) Jesus sent them out; this was His harvest, the whole scheme is His and it is His power that will sustain and equip them for the task. They cannot go in their own strength, but only in strength that God supplies.

They have a message: "*When you...*" (10:8ff) Jesus is King; Jesus is Lord; God's kingdom is near. Their message is about Jesus; Jesus is important; listen to Jesus. Their message is not about themselves; the sole focus of their message is how important Jesus is. The 'Kingdom of God' is not a place on a map, but is perhaps better understood as 'kingship' – God is king, God rules over His people; people need to be the kind of people that God wants rather than ordering life in selfish and self-centred way. The challenge of this message for the people who heard it then was to respond by listening to the 72 and taking in their message; the challenge of the message is to make Jesus King and Lord of their lives. Some did and others didn't and the 72 were to enjoy hospitality of those who listened and accepted, but for those who didn't respond: "*Even the...*" (10:11) – a sign of God's displeasure at their rejection. "*Whoever...*" (10:16) The fruitfulness of their ministry is seen in the people who listen.

Here are 72 people telling others who had never met Jesus, all about Him. They would hear about Him and hear the good news about God's kingship coming near and then come to meet Jesus and find their hopes fulfilled and their needs met. We call this mission and evangelism. This is what Wm Temple means by: "The Church is the only society on earth which exists for the benefit of those outside it." This is what Jesus calls His Church to be and to do, to be people who are ready and willing to tell those outside the Church all about Jesus. This is not about standing on street corners preaching sermons; it is not even about going door-to-door in pairs nowadays because it seems to me that that strategy is discredited. This is about people we know and meet elsewhere who are not Christians and sharing with them the good news that Jesus is King. Again this is not even about telling people how good the Church is, and certainly not about telling people how good the preacher is; but is about telling people how good Jesus is!

Who introduced you to Christian faith? We've twice run a course called *Lost for Words* which is designed to help us speak about our faith to our friends and this is one of the questions and exercises. Who introduced you to Christian faith? For most people, it was not the preacher or the minister. For most people it was a family member, mother, father, grandmother, or friend who invited them to Church or talked to them about being a Christian in the ordinary things of life. Most of us were introduced to Christian faith by people like that. So let's turn the question around: 'who can you introduce to Christian faith?' This is not about being special people with a special calling; this is

calling we all have, to be out-going Christians, ready, willing and able to share something important with people we know, as the opportunity arises.

It can be quite simple: you meet someone in the Post Office tomorrow morning when you're collecting your paper or posting a letter and they say to you 'Why do you go to Church?' - what do you say? Could you answer their question in a sentence? Or you're in the staff room, 5 minutes before the bell rings to go back to work and someone says 'what does your Christian faith mean to you? I wish I could understand!' - how would you answer their question simply? There are ways of doing that, simple ways that tell something of Jesus' story, linked with our story of faith. But first of all we need to be people who are praying for these opportunities to arise and for wisdom to know what to say and for courage to take these opportunities. We are called to be people who are looking out-ward to others, ready to share important things with people we meet.

2)The Parable of the Good Samaritan – Jesus told this story in answer to a question. He said 'Christian faith is quite simple really: love God and love your neighbour; that's all there is to it!' But someone wanted to know who his neighbour was. Was it meant as a smart question to trap Jesus? Or was it a genuine desire to know? Jesus told the story of a man being beaten up and left by the roadside and how first the priest and then the Levite came past; both were respected Jewish religious figures, but both came out badly! They walked past on the other side of the road; they did not take time to be concerned for the man in need. The third man came along, who was a foreigner and more than that, the sworn enemy of the Jews, but it was the Samaritan who stopped to help. "*Which of...*" (10:36f) Again turn that question around and the question to which the parable leads us is this: 'to whom can I be a neighbour?' and the answer is 'anyone in need!' It does not matter who that person is; it does not matter their background, race, religion. I can be a neighbour to someone in need.

An out-going Church, caring for its community? Outgoing people, caring for people around them? This is the challenge with which Jesus presents us in this powerful story. It is good that we care for one another as Christians within the Church family; it is great that we support one another and one of great tragedies of the Church is when Christian relationships are strained or even broken! But we are not only to care for people like us, for the people we know, for people who share our Christian faith; we are to care for people in need no matter who they are, no matter where we find them, no matter what their need. That's challenge of this parable!

I came across a church which was having some new people come around and they were different from the church people; they had different social backgrounds and had different kinds of need and some were quite demanding of the love and compassion of the Christians. The Session Clerk of that congregation was asked about these new people and he made it very clear that he did not like having these new people around because they were forcing the Church to change. He was describing a Church that was happy to be inward-looking, keeping itself alive, keeping its show on the road, but not

prepared to love and care for people in need around about it. Think about person who comes thru' door of Church for 1st time and does not know what to do; or the person you know who might love to come through the door, but hasn't the courage and you might be person to midwife them into Christian faith. What can you do? 'Nothing' is the wrong answer! Wouldn't it be marvellous to be walking down the street or be on the bus with your son or grandson and someone says 'hello' & you have a conversation and later your son or grandson says 'who was that?' and you can say 'that's a person I helped find Jesus'?

"It is not the Church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the Church." (Moltmann) We have a missionary God; God is an outgoing God. He longs to reach out to the world with the good news of love and grace. Isaiah talks of the Servant who has a role not only for Israel, not only inside the kingdom, but an out-going job, to be a light for all the nations; a missionary God sent His servant to do an out-going job. That is what God is like; that's what He wants His Church to be like, to think about people who are outside the Church and pray for opportunities to tell them about Jesus; to care for people in need no matter who they are and where they come from. An out-going Church, ready to tell, ready to love?