

REFLECTION for June 14th.2020

We read in today's passage from the Gospel of Matthew; *"When Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion on them they were like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few, therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'* "

Jesus then proceeded to tell the twelve apostles to go out and tell the people about himself. Interestingly, they were only to talk to Jewish people and the span of this period appears, from later passages to be limited. Twelve Jewish men, talking only to Jews and calling on their traditions of hospitality indicates a sensitivity to a narrow cultural context for this mission.

There is a similar account of this mission in Luke's gospel but later in the same gospel we read that Jesus appointed seventy two of his followers to go ahead of him to prepare the people for his own arrival. They were given the same instructions to travel light and accept hospitality but there is no indication that their mission was limited to Jews. Jesus says to them, *"Whoever listens to you, listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me rejects the one who sent me."* Luke 10 v 16 And in the next verse we learn that they returned home later, full of joy.

In more recent times, I had the pleasure of seeing Deborah Mundy licensed as a Reader at the church in Aviemore. Bishop Mark started his sermon by asking the question, "Who can talk to others about God?" And whilst we were thinking in our heads that the answer was ordained clergy or maybe, given the occasion, Readers as well, he came back with the answer, "Everyone." If anyone asks us, as Christians, questions about our faith, they should expect answers. The good news of the gospel is for sharing by every Christian. Using the analogy of the harvest, before mechanisation, it was essential that everyone, including children, should be there in the field working. Not everyone needed to be an expert with a scythe.

But, the Bishop continued to say, we expect that someone who teaches the faith with authority and conviction from the pulpit or in a study group should have spent some time in further study and prayerful preparation for the task. For Readers, the training takes three years part-time, for ordained clergy a longer period.

Studying the other readings set for the day I am impressed by how well they complement the gospel. Moses telling the people they are God's chosen, a treasured possession out of all peoples, a priestly kingdom. And this has been extended to all people through Jesus as the reading from the epistle to the Romans confirms. Then there is Psalm 100. The words are so familiar because the metrical version, dating from the sixteenth century, is that glorious rousing hymn, 'ALL PEOPLE that on earth do dwell'. To sing that in a crowded church, with the organ at full blast, is indeed an uplifting spiritual experience. I look forward to the time when restrictions are lifted and we can meet again to sing this hymn of praise.

With every blessing, Jacqueline