

**Sermon for 4<sup>th</sup> July 2010**  
**The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few**  
Trinity 5 (Luke 10:1-11, Galatians 6:7-16)

I want to read you an anonymous letter I received this week.

Dear Rector, There are 101 people on our church electoral roll, but 25 are frail or elderly. That leaves 76 to do all the work. However, 3 are away at college. That leaves 73 to do all the work. 26 of them are tired because they have demanding jobs, so that leaves 47 to do all the work. 8 have small children or teenagers and no time to call their own. That leaves 39 to do all the work. 18 have other important interests, which leaves 21 to do all the work, but 5 live too far away to come regularly. So that leaves 16 to do all the work. And 15 of them say they've done their part. So, Rector, that leaves YOU and ME and, frankly, I'm exhausted. Good luck. Signed: A. Parishioner

There are definitely times when it feels just like that. There are times when the God thing is all too much for us. God asks a lot of us – to love our neighbours as ourselves, to love our enemies even, to love God above everything else, when everything else always seems so tempting and attractive, and so much easier than loving God. But the Church asks even more. I had a bit of reputation when I was in Burnham, and I think it might just have caught up with me here by now. If you see me coming towards you with a purposeful look in my eye, you know it's time to walk very briskly in the opposite direction!

It sometimes feels that the Church (or the vicar even) doesn't care or doesn't understand the pressures we're under and just expects more and more of us until all our energy and resources are sucked up and we're spat out again on the other side. I know, I've been there too. Sometimes I still feel as though I'm there.

The harvest is plentiful, says Jesus, but the workers are few. So 'twas always thus. There really were no glory days of the church, not even at the beginning, despite our memories tricking us that it was all much better a few years ago when the church was full, there was plenty of money, and there were enough people to do everything. Even Jesus is saying, there's not enough people.

Jesus trained 12 people to spread the good news. In ch 9 we hear the story of him sending them out to try their new mission. And what a bunch they were, among them a loudmouth, two mummy's boys, a political extremist, a turn-coat and a dismal pessimist. Not the sort you'd chose to train up for a world-class job really. But at times they really thought they were literally God's gift to the world. Only a few verses before today's reading these same disciples had been arguing about who was most important among them. That's when Jesus showed them a little child and shocked them to their core by telling them they'd totally misunderstood everything and they were to become like nobodies if they wanted God to treat them as somebodies. Now we hear Jesus not even sending the ones who'd had the special training, but 70 others to do the

work. Perhaps they were part trained, I don't suppose they thought they were up to the job, but out they had to go because there were people Jesus knew were desperate to hear that the Kingdom of God was near them. The number 70 is important – it comes from Genesis 10 when all the nations of the earth are listed – guess what – 70. Jesus sending the 70 is symbolic for Jesus sending everyone, this is a universal mission for followers of Jesus. We're not just meant to be disciples, to learn from and follow Jesus, we are also apostles, sent out by Jesus to do his work in the world.

Of course we're busy and tired and have a hundred and one other priorities. BUT, that's no excuse to pretend we can't hear God calling us to do his work or to wait for someone else to do it. To quote someone I heard at this time last year – what's special about you that Jesus gave you a sick note? What's so different about this church that we can't share the good news of Jesus and live the gospel graciously through our everyday lives?

The church has this terrible habit of hearing the call of Jesus: the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few. Now go, I'm sending you ... And what do we do with that call? Do we head out, dressed for work? No, we shut ourselves away in a barn and argue about what colour we should paint the combine harvester. There are plenty of clergy who are far more qualified than I am to be your Rector and Sulhamstead's Rector. They have more experience than me, more confidence and pzazz than me and are frankly better priests than I'll ever be. But they are not who God has called here to do this job; God has called me to do it. And even though the responsibility of it terrifies me at times, I have to do this work to the best of my ability because God has asked me to do it, and I can't and won't refuse God.

Here's the bottom line. Jesus sends you and me. Jesus doesn't just send those who've been on the training course, he sends everyone – the ones who aren't really prepared, who don't think they're up to the job. Off you go, says Jesus. Don't go alone, go with someone you can share the load with, and I'll be along behind you soon. You don't need to take any home comforts or anything to make the going any easier. Be prepared for it to be tough. But there's one thing you mustn't forget - pray for help.

St Paul says much the same: let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

With God's grace we will see some of the results of our work, but much of it will be hard work, there's no getting away from that. But Jesus promises us that those who accept the call to be apostles as well as disciples can rejoice, because our names are written in heaven. Amen. I pray your name is written in heaven.

Blessings,  
Gill