



THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY MORNING
TRINITY 1
14 JUNE 2020

The one who endures to the end will be saved

Matthew 9:35 – 10:23

There is a lot in today's gospel reading that seems relevant to our current situation, and I want to explore some of the themes a little, though I am not certain that I can produce a satisfactory concluding synthesis!

The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. We have heard a good deal about the shortage of labour to pick the crops in the fields this year, partly due to the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, but also because there has been a general reaction against immigration over recent years, whilst our agricultural industry has become more and more reliant on overseas seasonal labour. On the one hand some folk rail against 'foreigners' taking British jobs, whilst others point out that people from poorer countries find even the lowest paid British jobs quite attractive and blame the farmers for being prepared to pay so little. Others, again, find that field work is actually back breaking and not something they want, or feel physically able, to do, no matter what the rate of pay. This is another example among the growing number where the current crisis has exposed an unsatisfactory situation in our national life that we have been overlooking for years. How we bring our Christian insights to bear on this, and so many other political and social concerns, is a challenge for all of us, but one that we must face if we are to be true to our call to follow Jesus.

These twelve Jesus sent out....to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. When the churches were first closed at the beginning of the lockdown period, the Archbishop of Canterbury explained that it was the duty of the Church of England, as the national church, to give a lead. This past week, in response to the protests as part of the *Black lives matter* campaign, the Bishops of Leicester and Loughborough stressed how important it was for the Church of England to be genuinely open to people of every ethnic and other background. This is something that I have long known to be true, and I rather resented the Archbishop presuming to tell me it was, as if it was some new-found insight, but more mature reflection reveals to me that I may not believe in my heart so resolutely that to which my head gives whole-hearted assent. I do think that the Church of England is a Christian presence in every community, and needs to strive to maintain that. Traditionally we have done that by the parochial system, with a worshipping community, a priest and a church building in every parish, on hand and, at least theoretically, accessible to anyone who needs or wants it. We have seen in recent years the decline in the number of priests, and in the size of the worshipping communities in many places, and recent church survey, taken since the start of the current pandemic, reveals, unsurprisingly, that many expect this trend to be accelerated as we begin to emerge from lock-down. I am sure that we are called still to be the national church, with an utterly inclusive outreach to proclaim the good news (by actions probably more than words), but how we achieve that, nationally and locally is something we will have to work out in the coming weeks, months and years.

Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. This is a text that has haunted me over the past few weeks. We need to be fully engaged with the world in which we live, sharing its joys and its pains, lending and receiving support to and from our friends, neighbours and, indeed, strangers. We need to be open-hearted in our dealings with, and thinking about, others, and there have been so many examples of people doing just that over the past few months. But we also need to be realistic. What is hard enough to do on a personal level is even more difficult at a political level. On Monday night Gareth and I watched on TV the dramatization of one victim of the Windrush scandal, and that followed on from a programme about the scandal of the sub-postmasters who had fallen victim to the errors in the Post Office's *Horizon* accounting system. In both cases I found myself shouting at the TV in rage against public bodies treating innocent people as criminals and surrounding themselves with all the panoply of the law that it took persistent and courageous journalists and others to keep on digging to expose the truth of their perfidy. These were two cases that were exposed. How many other instances are there that have not seen the light of day? Or, again, the case of the murder of George Floyd in Minnesota, which, because of the mobile 'phone camera recording of the event has made it impossible to deny the facts, raises the question of all those other deaths of black people that have slipped by almost unnoticed, except by their immediate families and circle of friends. We are in this world, and we must engage with it, as

must our leaders, and, whilst recognising they do not have an easy task, our duty is to call them to account and make it clear what can and what cannot be done in our name. I don't see myself engaged in protest marches, but I do need to find out what is my alternative.

The one who endures to the end will be saved. Perhaps this provides the concluding synthesis? So much around us at the moment seems uncertain, if not actually chaotic. The things I have mentioned above are only a few aspects drawn from the myriad issues that are pressing upon us today, but Jesus reminds his disciples that he is sending them out into a world that is full of perils and dangers, but that they will not be alone in facing those terrors because the spirit of God the Father is actually inhabiting them, not even just standing with them. So too it can be for us if we cast ourselves upon him in this our time of trouble.

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