

## Matthew 9: 35-10:8 Sermon

On a day when we've been reminded about the great work that the Samaritans do, it is great to have a Gospel reading which reminds us of God's care for all of the people he has made. In this reading Jesus goes around proclaiming the 'Good News' and healing people, and then sends his followers, the 12 disciples, to do the same. Jesus has compassion on the people around them who are 'harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.'

It's a real privilege therefore to support the Samaritans and organizations like them. In the work they do, they are demonstrating the same compassion and care for others that Jesus demonstrates and commands his followers to show too. As Christians we bless the work of the Samaritans, whilst hoping and dreaming of a world where they are not needed.

We've noted Jesus's compassion for the helpless and harassed. The reference to 'sheep without a shepherd' is a dig at the leadership of society at the time, who were not doing their job of shepherding the people. We don't have time to explore that fully today, but shepherding (or not) is fully of images from previous places in the Bible. It does, however, make us see Jesus's healings of people as more holistic than simply miraculous fixing of physical medical conditions. The whole person is important to Jesus, not simply their physical health and so it should be with us.

One might question why Jesus's preaching of 'Good News' gets such a high billing though. Surely the important thing is the care for people and therefore preaching is either unimportant in comparison or else actually manipulative? That's how we tend to feel about it today in any case. Certainly, it would be completely inappropriate and very wrong to use a service like Samaritans as a 'way in' to convert people to a different faith. So what is Jesus doing?

I think it is important to understand what Jesus means by 'Good News,' as this term has become shorthand for other things in church history. The Greek word for Good News is '*euangelion*' – the word from which we get evangelism – another term which carries a lot of baggage nowadays. Preaching the *euangelion*, however, in Jesus's day was something that traditionally was done by a herald who went through the cities proclaiming the *euangelion* that there was a new Emperor. The Good News was that there was a new ruler, a new way of being – the world had changed whether you wanted it or not. It wasn't an attempt to persuade, it was simply a statement that something monumental had happened, and could have been followed up by the consequences of this happening.

So for Jesus, the *euangelion* is that the Kingdom of Heaven has drawn near. I've preached on this before so in shorthand – the Jewish people were looking for the day when God was going to return to his people, and with Jesus's arrival, this day had finally come. The outworking of this was that a new Kingdom was breaking through – a new way of being with new potential and new life. The miraculous healings were signs of this Kingdom, and a taste of things still to come when one day God would fully return to the world and live with us forever. We, now, live within this interim time where Jesus has come and so some renewal has begun, but we look forward to a day when all creation will be renewed in a life with God in its entirety.

So for Jesus's preaching, we shouldn't hear some sort of manipulative persuasion geared to vulnerable people. Instead, we simply hear that God loves everyone and has come to bring about a world where healing and wholeness is reality and new life is possible. We know that this world isn't fully here yet. But we are people who care for God's creation – for all his people – as bringers of

hope and healing now, in anticipation of a day where life will be lived to the full and there will be no more hurt and tears.

This is the vision that is being expounded here. There are other issues and objections such as this sense of going to the Jews first – a massive question, but one which is turned on its head with the Great Commission only a few months later – and issues such as payment, which again, I don't have time to do justice to, but simply to say that Jesus's followers should not profit from their message because God's love, compassion and concern is freely given to his creation.

Finally then, for Jesus, the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. It is fantastic to have a representative from the Samaritans here to remind us of those who work for the good of humanity. We thank God for them. But this is the vocation of all of us – to share God's love, compassion, care and hope with everyone we meet. As Christians, we dream of a world which looks very different from the one we inhabit now. We look forward to it in faith. And we follow Jesus as we work, in the power of God, to bring that hoped-for world into our here and now in every way we can.

Amen.