

Pray for workers

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Date: 12 January 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Let's share our prayer together.! Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence.

! May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your great glory our supreme concern. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Where do you start? I was almost tempted to say, where do I begin? But that would lead us into another popular song and maybe Andrew's not old enough for that one.

Where do you start? If you're decorating at home, do you paint the skirting boards before the wallpaper or do the wallpaper and then paint the skirting boards?

Does it make any difference where you start? Do you cover over all the furniture and the carpets and then start the decorating or do you just jump right in and move things around as you go?

[1 : 1 1] Getting the right starting step is essential. If you go wrong at the beginning, you end up spending lots of time retracing your steps and doing what you should have done first so that you can head off in the right direction.

So where do we start in mission? The work of mission does not begin with the great commission.

The risen Lord Jesus Christ telling his disciples, go, baptize all people, make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

It doesn't begin with that. The work of mission doesn't even begin in Matthew 9 or 10 where we're reading this morning. The mission of God was declared over all creation and to all creation from the moment God started to create anything.

The mission of God is always before us. We need to recognize when it comes to sharing in mission, we are not beginning the thing.

[2 : 3 1] We are not getting to go first. Our fathers and mothers before us served in the mission of God. Back over centuries and generations, men and women of faith have served the mission of God before us.

But even before that, God has been active in mission. Right from the moment he drew his first breath and said, let there be light.

Mission doesn't start with us. We get to join in God's mission, which has already started. But even so, even once we recognize that we don't get to go first, we've got to begin somewhere.

There's something we need to do to enter into sharing in mission with God. And what should we do first? Well, the two paragraphs in our reading today, the end of Matthew 9 and the beginning of Matthew 10, help us with this.

Jesus himself shows us and tells us where to start in mission. Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages.

[4 : 01] Jesus did not begin mission sitting at home thinking about it. He did not begin mission in the synagogue building, gathering together with like-minded folks to think about mission there, wondering what to do.

Mission is active. Mission is active. Mission is being sent. And so the first thing Jesus did was to get up and go.

God was sending Jesus into all the cities and all the villages. Sending the good news of the gospel into all the world. So Jesus had to get up and go.

As he went through the cities and the villages, Jesus paid attention. He noticed things about the cities and the villages where he went.

He noticed things about the people he met. Last week, we spoke about God's mission as being sent to meet people in need at their point of need.

[5 : 16] Not what I think their point of need is. But what I have learned. What I have found out to be their actual point of need.

We begin by learning what is needed. Too often, we and other Christians and other congregations and mission agencies and Christian movements have set out on mission, but with a mission that nobody needs.

We make assumptions about our community, our parish, our city, our nation, or other nations. And we act on those assumptions, which very often are shallow and superficial.

We need to begin by humbling ourselves. By recognizing that we don't know as much as we think we know. We need to begin by going and learning.

Still in verse 35, Jesus was teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. There is a caricature of the office manager who has been so long in his office that he's forgotten all about the task he is asking his employees to do.

[6 : 50] He no longer understands the work or the workplace. I knew a young man once who finished his time at teacher training college and got a job in a primary school and with 18 months was a deputy head.

Within 18 months after that, he was a primary school head teacher. I sometimes wondered how he got on in the staff room with a primary school teacher with 20 or 30 years experience in the classroom.

As this young man tried to share his wonderful new ideas that would make everything better. Our mission as disciple of Jesus begins with Jesus doing mission before us.

Jesus went to the cities and the villages to do mission. He spoke about the good news of God's love and grace for all people.

He learned what was needed and met people at their point of need for healing, for comfort, for hope. Jesus did it. He walked the walk, as they say.

[8 : 07] He did it before us. And now we follow him. When we are following Jesus into mission, Jesus is leading us into activities which he himself has done before us.

He knows the task. He has already done the work. We follow him into what he already knows. This means that Jesus is our model, our example.

We do not start out in mission with a blank sheet of paper. We are not frantically looking around wondering what to do or how to begin. We fix our eyes on Jesus.

We follow him. He has gone first and done the work before us. Our first step is to follow Jesus.

To do what Jesus has already done. When we start doing what we know Jesus has done, we are starting in mission.

- [9 : 16] A name Jesus said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. I suspect there are very few of us here this morning, if any, who have ever run a farm.
- There might be some of us have worked on a farm, maybe in holidays, or maybe we've got family or friends who are farmers. But I suspect if we were to volunteer to go and help with the harvest, we would need very clear guidance about when to begin and how to begin and what to do next.
- An inexperienced eye driving past the field might think, oh, well, now's the time. We should start in that corner. But it takes an inexperienced farmer to know how and when to begin gathering in the crops.
- Jesus is the Lord of the harvest. He has been in the towns and villages. He has done the work of mission before us.
- When he says the fields are ready for harvest, we can trust him. Now is the time. Jesus has been in the harvest fields.
- [10 : 36] Jesus has worked in the harvest fields. Jesus has lifted up his head and looked round and noticed that the workers for the harvest are few.
- Jesus knows these things because he has been and done the work. Jesus knows what he is talking about. If Jesus is sending us today into his mission field, then we need to trust him.
- Interesting word that, isn't it? Trust. We need to trust him that he knows what he's doing. That the harvest is actually ready. We need to trust Jesus that there will be a harvest.
- Jesus is not sending us into empty, barren fields so that we can gather nothing. He is sending us out, to change the image a wee bit, but Jesus did this himself, to fish for people.
- And there are people to fish for. It's time to start. Jesus has called us. Jesus is sending us. Jesus' word to us is go.
- [11 : 49] There is a harvest and we are the workers being sent to gather it in. But notice what Jesus then asks us to do.
- Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest. Pray earnestly. Plead with God.
- Ask and request from him. The work of mission begins in the place of prayer. Sometimes we can be uncertain in our praying.
- How can I know what God wants me to pray for? If I am to pray in the will of God, how do I know what God's will is? Well, if we get a verse like this one, where Jesus tells us to pray and tells us exactly what to pray for.
- If we pray for this, we can be certain it's God's will. And we can be certain that Jesus will answer this prayer.
- [12 : 58] It turns out to be just a few words. Lord, send workers to the harvest field. You asked us to pray this.
- We are praying it. It's over to you now. We can be filled with confidence if we are praying back to Jesus the very words that he gave us to pray to him.
- Jesus wants to answer this prayer. He might not answer it in the way we imagine or in the time we imagine, but Jesus will answer it and send workers into his harvest field.
- We do not rush off into mission, charging about without a clue. We pray and we pray and we pray. And when we have prayed, we pray again.
- Now, I suppose, theoretically, there could be a time when the church has done too much praying. And we need to get out of the prayer room and start doing things.

- [14 : 10] But I've never encountered such a situation. In all my reading in the history of the church, I've never read of a situation where there was too much prayer from the church.
- More often, there's too little prayer. Or not any prayer at all. And so we pray. And we pray.
- And we pray again. And then when Jesus answers our prayers, we follow him into service in God's mission. So who then did Jesus call to prayer?
- Who are the people Jesus is saying to? You are the ones. You are to pray. Well, in verse 37, Jesus said to his disciples. And notice the same word is used at the start of chapter 10.
- Jesus called to him his disciples. Now, you might remember that in the manuscripts of the New Testament, there were no chapter divisions. There were no verse divisions.
- [15 : 20] On the same line of the manuscript, we run right from the end of verse 38 into the start of chapter 10. There is no distinction between the two.
- The disciples in verse 37 are the same disciples in verse 1 in chapter 10. Those disciples whom Jesus called to pray are the same disciples whom Jesus called to himself.
- The same disciples to whom Jesus gives authority. He called to him his 12 disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out, to heal every disease and every affliction.
- What are the things that Jesus did when he went on mission? He set people free from demons. He met them at their point of need for healing and comfort and hope.
- Now, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of the harvest, is calling to himself his disciples and giving to us the same authority he has to go and do what he has done.
- [16 : 38] Just to make sure we get the point, in verse 2, the disciples who are authorized by Jesus are described by the word apostles. The names of the 12 apostles are these.
- And you'll remember that the word apostle simply means sent out. The disciples are the ones who are sent by Jesus to do the work of mission.
- So let's ask this question. How is the prayer that Jesus has given us to pray to start off our mission, Lord, send workers into the harvest field, how is that prayer answered?
- When we pray earnestly, what will Jesus do? Jesus will answer this prayer by calling to himself those who pray, by authorizing and commissioning them and sending them out to be the answer to the prayer.
- Jesus gives an example of his own service and mission. This is what your mission will be like, going out to cities and villages, meeting people, learning about them, bringing God's grace and blessing into their lives at their point of need.
- [18 : 08] And you, faithful disciple of Jesus, you are the answer to that prayer. You are God's invoice.
- You are the ones Jesus is naming and sending. You are the fellow workers with Jesus in his work of mission.
- No doubt by now you're thinking, perhaps some of you, well, I'll not bother praying then because I don't want to be saint.
- I really don't want to be the answer to that prayer. So if I don't pray it, I can't be saint. Fair enough. But the question then is, do you really want to be a disciple of Jesus?
- Do you want to follow him? Do you want to be found to be faithful in serving Jesus? And if the answer to those questions or any of them is yes, then you must answer when Jesus calls you to pray, to send out workers into the harvest field.
- [19 : 23] You must answer when Jesus calls you to himself. You must accept his appointing you and authorizing you and sending you to be the worker in the harvest field.

If you would be a faithful disciple of Jesus, you must pray that he would send workers to the harvest field and you must answer when Jesus says you're the answer to the prayer.

There is no greater joy for a disciple of Jesus than to be working and serving together with Jesus in mission.

We get to share in the very mission of God to bring his blessing to all the world. We, as we work in mission, are God's gift to the world.

God sent Jesus to fulfill and accomplish his purposes of blessing. Following Jesus, we are sent by all of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's purposes of blessing all people where they need.

[20 : 43] Pray then that God would send workers into his harvest field. Let's use part of every hour in this day of prayer at the start of February to pray that God would send workers into his harvest field.

knowing that the answer to the prayer is me and you. When he sends us, let us go.

Where he sends us, let us go there. To whom he sends us, let us go to them. That God might bless all peoples through the gospel of his son Jesus.

Let's pray together. Father, we recognize the temptation to run away from you, to hide in a dark corner so that we might not be sent.

But as we recognize that temptation, we call to our mind someone who was sent to us. Someone whom you sent to speak to us about Jesus.

[22 : 05] Someone who showed us the love, the grace, the compassion of God. They answered your call.

They were sent to us and through them our lives have been transformed and we have been blessed by you. use us like them.

Send us out that others might hear, might experience your love in Jesus through us and our humble service.

There's a great harvest not far away from us, immediately all around us. Send us to that field. gather in those who need you.

Pour out your blessing, we pray for your own glory. Amen. Amen.