

Growing Community

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[0:00] Folks, let's just bow our hearts and heads in prayer.! Let's just briefly pray. Father, may the words of my mouth,!

Oh, wow! Amazing! Great! Well, I've got a big surprise there, I must say.

That's good to hear. Have you ever noticed what happens when people lift very heavy weights at the gym? And for those that don't go very often, myself included, used to go, in fact, the last time I went to the gym, when I used to play rugby, and it was in Porterfield.

And I used to train with Craig Denain, and they used to have prison officers who played rugby. And they thought it would be a good idea for us to train in the prison, and we got the offer of using it. But what I wasn't gambling for was the prison officers taking me right through the cages. Now, I don't know if you know about the cages in Inverness Prison, but they are renowned.

[1:35] And it was very, very intimidating, I can tell you. I think I must have lifted double what I normally lifted that day, because I was really pumped up after going through those cages.

But anyway, that's the last time probably that I actively went and weight lifted in a gym. But what you'll notice is that when people are lifting heavy weights, they will invariably do it in twos or in pairs, okay?

And there'll be one person lifting the weights, and the other guy or lady will be there as a spotter, okay? Now, it's a spotter's role to stand by the person lifting the weights and ensure they are okay, okay?

So, sometimes they don't need to do anything except just be there. And that gives the person lifting the weights quite a bit of assurance and confidence that if something does go wrong, they've got somebody there immediately to pick up the pieces, just to take that weight, okay?

So, that's the spotter's role. He or she would be willing to step in if something goes wrong.

[2:59] And you'll quite often find that as the training session goes on, the weightlifter and the spotter will often share, you know, swap over.

And the spotter will be lifting the weights, and the weightlifter will take on the role of being the spotter. But one thing they do share a common goal with, and that is that they're encouraging each other to lift weights safely, okay?

And today's reading from Paul's letter to the Galatians is asking something similar of us as well.

Being responsible members of a community means that we should walk well together and help one another, just like the words that we've sung.

Walking well together and helping one another, just like the spotter in the gym. But sometimes it's just being there, just being there, and that's all it takes, okay?

[4:13] It's just being there. Sometimes when we're walking with others, people have burdens that are just too heavy for them to carry.

And that's when we should be there, not only to help, to take the lift, to take the strain, but help when asked.

When asked, without any notice, that's when we should be stepping in as Christians to help.

And I have to say, in my role as chaplain, I'm just there once a week. I'm just there as a presence. But you know this, I'm finding more and more people coming to sit next to me and just share their burdens. And that's a trust thing as time goes on.

[5:14] That's a trust thing. And it will still take another year or so yet before I've got full trust. But I find now that the staff are particularly keen to have a chat.

And farmers are starting to slowly come. So it's just being a spotter for folks that are there. But today, I'm really going to be focusing on the passage from Luke.

Because there's quite a few teachings there that we can all learn from. So that's mainly where I'm focusing on. And Luke writes, After this, the Lord appointed 70 others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.

Folks, the work of this church, the work of this community, is not a solitary mission.

You may think that because Marina's here, she's got the sole responsibility. Doesn't work like that. We're all responsible.

[6:34] We're all responsible. And this church is not a solitary mission. we're collectively responsible for how this church does.

How its community thrives. Now, Jesus sent them out two by two. And he did that for a reason. And that's because it's a journey of companionship. It's a journey of mutual support. It's a journey of accountability.

That's why Jesus did it. No one is sent out there alone because the work of God is communal. It really is. it's not down to the individual. It's a communal effort. Which is why the passage from Galatians I put before you this morning goes along with this one so well.

[7:46] We each need a spotter. Now, when I was a street pastor over in Tain, we were sent out in twos.

or fours, we were never sent out as individuals onto the streets. And the reason is as I've just read to you, it's biblical.

There's a reason for doing it. You're there to back each other up. You're there to be that person's spotter. And you're there as a presence, not to bash people over the head with the Bible, but you're there to show them the love and the grace of Jesus in your lives.

So, from this first passage that Cammie read to us today, Jesus' instructions are quite simple.

They're quite clear. here. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. We know, we know the world is ripe.

[9:05] It's hungry. It's hungry for hope. It's hungry for truth. hungry for love, but the laborers are few.

Therefore, in your prayers, ask the Lord, ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers out into the harvest fields.

But first, and this is quite important, Jesus doesn't tell his followers, he doesn't tell them to work hard, he doesn't tell them to get on with it.

His first instruction to them is to pray. It's to pray. the first act of mission is not strategy, it's not planning, it's prayer.

Acknowledging that the work that you're about to undertake is God's and we are just humble participants.

[10:23] commandments. And Jesus also tells the 70, he also tells them, go on your way, see, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.

Now, if you think about that image, it's quite worrying, it's quite stark and unsettling. Let me think about it now, lambs are vulnerable.

Wolves dangerous, they hunt lambs. So the followers of Jesus are not sent out there as conquerors or charmers, anything like that, but those who are willing to risk, risk being vulnerable, to step into an unknown place, in their lives.

Not their own making, but trusting. Trusting, not at their own strength, but the one that sends them.

And Jesus also says they are to travel light. not at they've got to carry no purse, no bag, no sandals.

Jesus is asking his followers to radically depend on him and on the hospitality of strangers out there.

[12:08] And if you think about it, that's the total opposite end of our worldly wisdom, isn't it? I mean, we're asked now to gather in, we're asked to hold, we're asked to secure, make everything right before we act.

That's what the world tells us to do. And Jesus is saying, go, trust, and let God provide for you along the way.

And he will. I can tell you he will. So he also asks people to lean on folks' hospitality. And he tells the 70 whatever house you enter, first say peace. Peace to this house. So that mission, that mission begins in peace. With a sort of a mini blessing. The 70 aren't to impose or force, or as I said earlier, a Bible bash, but offer peace.

[13:33] You may think, why? Why? Well, here, Jesus tells us, and he teaches us, that the gospel cannot be forced on others.

Our role is to offer, it's to bless, it's to share. How it is received is not in our control. that's not our responsibility. Our call is to be a faithful presence, to be instruments, to be instruments of healing, to be instruments of hope.

It's not to go out there and try and argue with people, get their backs on. love. And Jesus also said that they are to remain in the house, eating and drinking what is set before them.

Now, when I first started my career as an agronomist, many years ago, I started over in Keith, and I started out there in a lot of the crofting communities out there.

[14:53] And the guy I was working for at the time, he was quite a well-known chap, but he was also very, very good with people. And he says, right, whenever we go on farm and we get invited in, you must go.

You must accept that offer of hospitality. And whatever the farmer or the farmer's wife offers you, you must take. no, I won't drink it, I won't eat it, because you don't like it.

You must take it, you must participate. And that very first day I went out with him, and we got invited into this kitchen, and the farmer said to me, what would you like?

And I said, I'll have a cup of tea, thank you. And Ian had a cup of tea as well, so the farmer was struggling around for mugs to give us. He found one on the side of the kitchen, and he just blew into it like that.

That was all the washing I had. You've just got to take it. Can't complain. And that's a way of humility, isn't it, if you think about it.

[16:06] That's accepting what is offered. It's being present, not shopping around for better conditions or even a greater comfort.

Those 70, us, are sent to heal, heal the sick. We're also sent to proclaim.

We've got to proclaim the kingdom of God. We've got to say to these folk, the kingdom of God has come near to you. And that's a message.

It's a message of both deed and word. So the two are linked there. The kingdom is announced and it's more or less brought to life by acts of compassion.

God is to God but Jesus is quite clever as well because he also advises us that we might get rejected.

[17:21] This can happen. It can happen quite a lot. Trust me, I know. But Jesus also prepared his followers.

He prepared them for rejection. He said, whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you.

Yet know this, the kingdom of God has come near. I'm here to tell you that rejection is not failure. It's not failure, folks. Just because you're rejected, it doesn't mean that you've failed. The message is still spoken. That's the important thing.

The kingdom is still proclaimed. We and the disciples should not take it personally. That's something we've got to remember.

[18:26] Don't take it personally. Shake the dust off and move on. It's a work of the Holy Spirit to make that word alive in somebody else.

It's not our responsibility. So what does that mean today? How does this mean?

What does this mean for us in our lives here in Inver Gordon? Well, I believe we are all sent.

All of us. Every follower of Christ is commissioned. You might not think it, but you are.

You are commissioned in his work. The call is not just for the twelve. It's not just for your elders here. The call is for you as well. Anybody who would like to bear the name of Jesus.

[19:29] We are all sent into our homes, into our workplaces, our schools, our neighborhoods, and we're there to offer God's peace, to embody God's love, and proclaim Christ's nearness.

We're also vulnerable, very vulnerable. We are called to risk, to step out, not to be secure in our own resources, step out in the faith of God's provision.

And mission is always risky. Anybody that has had a go at it in the past will know it's risky. It stretches you, but it's, I can tell you, it's always a journey of trust.

Always. And when it goes, and it goes well, my word, you know, you really know. And we are also bearers of peace.

peace. As I said before, our presence is to be a blessing on others. If you think about this world that we're in just now, it's absolutely torn by division.

[21:04] It's torn by violence. It's torn by fear. Fear. Very important. We have to speak peace.

peace. We've got to live peace. We've got to trust that God's peace is greater than any wall, any wound, anything that can be inflicted on us.

And we also face rejection. And faithfulness, as I said to you before, doesn't always guarantee acceptance.

we just have to remember that. We're called to witness. We're not called to success. And we've got to remember our joy.

Our joy should be rooted in grace. grace. The true, the true, what's the best word to describe it?

[22:11] The true spring of our joy is not in results, but it should be in grace. Our names are written in heaven.

Already. They're already there. We are known, we are cherished. we're loved by God.

We're loved before, we're loved during, and we're loved at the end of any missional activity. And I want you to remember that.

And I want you to remember that when further on in that passage, when the 70 returned, they were joyful. Read it when you go home today. Read it. They were joyful.

joyful. And so should we be. We should be joyful. We're not sent out to conquer. We're sent to serve.

[23:13] Not to boast, but to bless. Not to fear, but to trust. We're sent to proclaim that nearness of God's kingdom.

The kingdom of peace, the kingdom of healing, and the kingdom of hope. And I want you to remember as you go home today, we're never ever alone.

Never. Christ goes with us. He goes before us, he goes behind us, and he is within us. And I would encourage you to walk in joy, knowing that your names are written in heaven already.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.