

Knox Uniting Church Cluster

Sunday June 14th, 2026 – (Year A. Pentecost +3)

Sermon (reflection) by Russell Croxford at Rowville Uniting Church

Bible passages: Psalm 116:12-19 and Matthew 9:35 – 10:8 (NRSVUE)

“Who, me...a missionary?”

PREAMBLE (early introduction to theme)

In our gospel reading today we have the story of the time when Jesus gathers his 12 disciples together, giving them a few instructions and then sends them out in mission to the people of Israel, to preach, heal and liberate those he called the ‘lost sheep’. Their task was to share the good news and give people hope in the knowledge that the ‘Kingdom of Heaven was near to them’. But, as Jesus solemnly points out to his team, this would be like, ‘mission impossible’ in many ways. It would be really tough. They would face rejection – or worse. They were being sent like ‘sheep among the wolves’. You would think that this huge and daunting task would require years of training and preparation. Yet Jesus selects twelve raw recruits, just novices, to be like Jesus himself out in the world, even exercising the supernatural powers as Jesus did. So, if ever we think we could not be a missionary for Jesus today, we need to simply look at the twelve people Jesus chose to send.

MESSAGE

When I was young, I had this idea in my head that one day I’d quite like to be a minister. But I definitely did *not* want to be a missionary! Missionaries had to go to places and do things I felt I could not do. So, minister, yes; missionary no way! Some years later I came to the realisation that you can be *both* at the same time. In fact, they are inseparable.

I often mention to people that I ‘took a break from ministry’ about ten years ago to work in another field. But hang on, does one ever really take a break from ministry? Does one ever take a break from being a missionary? Not really.

I’m not sure what you say to others about your own life’s vocation. You might say, “I’m not a minister, I’m a nurse”. Or “I’m not a missionary, I’m an engineer”. That’s not actually true, is it? My point is that *all of us* are ministers, and *all of us* are missionaries. And it’s about being a missionary that I’d like us to think about today.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus calls and sends his twelve disciples out in mission – to be missionaries. That calling and sending applies to each of us, just as much as it did to those disciples.

Our passage today is part of what is called the ‘Mission Discourse’ in Matthew’s gospel. It is a lengthy section of teaching by Jesus about mission. To get the best idea of this teaching we should really read up to the end of chapter 10. The gospel readings over the next couple of Sundays do cover the rest of the chapter, but it’s helpful to see it as one continuous unit.

The background to this mission-sending is that Jesus, himself had been doing a lot of healing and miracles (v35 and previous chapters). Now he wants his disciples to go out and do the same. The other piece of background, which provides the *reason* for his mission is Jesus’ deep compassion for the people who were like “sheep without a shepherd” (v36). Now he wants the disciples to feel the same compassion and let it be their driving force in their mission.

So, to begin his sending, Jesus gives his team a big pep-talk – like a coach revving up his team to go out against the opposition. He begins this pep-talk with an impassioned challenge, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few” (v37).

Then he launches into a long set of instructions about the ‘game plan’ the disciples must follow in their mission. And when you read through chapter ten, one thing in particular becomes very clear: This task he is setting before them will be very, very tough going. It will be like ‘mission impossible’. There will be obstacles, rejection, hostility and persecution. They may even be arrested! (10:19).

Not only will it be hard-going, but they will also be expected to do exactly what Jesus, their master had been doing – delivering the same message to the same people, performing the same works with the same power and the same authority!

Who was he kidding! And on top of that these disciples had received hardly any training for this, up to this point. And then, to cap it off, they were to go out without any money – not a cent, to finance their mission. How could they do that? Could you do that? I doubt I could do that. So, what makes this group of twelve guys so different – so special? Well, they weren’t different, or special at all. That’s the point. They were just like us.

The truth is, this group of disciples who became instant missionaries, was a weird, eclectic, group of unlikely people, called to do what Jesus asked of them. Among their group was the impetuous and outspoken Peter who denied Jesus three times. John, one of the ‘sons of thunder’ is said to have had an explosive temper. Matthew the despised tax collector worked for the hated Romans who brutally ruled the country. Sitting opposite this Roman-supporter was Simon, called a ‘zealot’ because all he wanted was to violently destroy the Romans. (I wonder how Matthew and Simon got on?) Thomas, the sceptical one, is among them too. Then there is Judas, greedy for money and one who would betray his Lord.

This is the group Jesus chose and sent! Hard to believe! But there is something else we need to learn from this story. Jesus *empowers* them to do what they think they can’t do – just as he empowers us to do what we think we can’t do. One example of this comes a bit later in chapter 10 when Jesus says, “Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (v19-20). That’s all they needed to know. It’s all we need to know too. And several times during his instructions he says, “Do not be afraid” (v 26, 28, 31). That’s an invitation to know the inner peace and joy of God’s presence – even when faced with opposition.

The local communities around us are full of hurting people, struggling in all kinds of ways. We may feel helpless to do anything. Yet still God chooses us. We are missionaries where we live and work. As long as there are people around us, we are in mission. And like the disciples, we don’t do it in our own strength. Christ is with us and he empowers us. An encouraging word, a gift, a prayer, a helping hand – these are the actions of a missionary. These are our ways of doing what Jesus did.

The other thing I’d like to add about being a missionary, is that it is our ‘response’ to what God has already done for us. As God has given us life, we bring that life to others. That’s our response. In our Psalm reading today, the writer, who has obviously been through some personal hardship or crisis, says, “What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?” (v12). Then, twice answers that question by declaring, “I will pay [‘fulfill’ in other translations] my vows to the Lord” (v 14,18). The ‘fulfilling of vows’ comes in the form of worship (v19) and serving the Lord (v16) – in whatever form that service takes. As Jesus said, when sending his team out, “Freely you have received, freely give” (v8)

Many of us here today have been baptized. In one sense we 'automatically' become a missionary when we are baptized. Yes, there will be growing, maturing, training, equipping and so on. All good things to do. But right from the start, like the disciples, we are missionaries, wherever God places us.

Going by today's bible story, it would be an understatement to say that being 'in mission' for God is not easy. But I believe it is a great comfort in knowing that we are 'chosen', just as the twelve guys were chosen. We are part of God's team. We belong. We are His. He is always with us, and the words of the prophet Isaiah come to mind: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you...when you walk through the fire you will not be burned" (Is 43:1-2)