

## What do you see?

### Romans 5v1-8 and Matthew 9v35 to 10v8 (Trinity One)

What have we heard, what have we seen?

As we sit with the world's pain at this time what comes home to us in searing ways

What we see is largely shaped by our experience. You see what you will through the lens of your own experiences of life. If we are a comfortable white person say, living a fairly comfortable life we will not see so clearly or feel so strongly the sense of outrage that so many are voicing in these days. Would we have seen or heard behind the protests to what the people are protesting about? Do bear in mind though that if we had been enjoying regular communion, we will have said words like this (in Prayer E) .....

**Lord of all life,  
help us to work together for that day  
when your kingdom comes  
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.**

In another communion prayer (F), we might have been saying.....

**Look with favour on your people and in your mercy hear the cry of our hearts.  
Bless the earth, heal the sick, let the oppressed go free  
and fill your Church with power from on high. Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.**

So do we hear and see the cry of the oppressed? Do we hear and see the cry for justice? Our world is full of systems that stand on people, so they can't breathe.

Throughout their lives, many black people are dehumanised, treated as unequal, deemed less by the systems that say they are for all people. Black lives matter, as does every life, but many don't believe that they do, at least not as much as other lives. The value is less. Do we see the importance of the moment now as the reckoning goes global? Or do we see anarchists and some rioters causing mayhem so we are blind to the demand for justice?

Matthew looks back to what he has already written (in Chapter 4v23) but substitutes 'all the cities and villages' for 'all Galilee' to show the comprehensive range of Jesus' ministry. The 'cities and the villages' speak of both urban and rural life situations under such a massive stress test today.

The figure of sheep without a Shepherd is rich in biblical references (Ezekiel 34 for instance). God says he is utterly opposed to leaders who do not care for people, for the downtrodden. He will send shepherds who do – like Jesus. There is therefore a rich message in this text.

We are blind to the oppression that sits on people. We are so preoccupied with ourselves and the immediate pressure we face that we do not see the obvious need of people around us. How did Jesus see people?

### **1. We need to see as Jesus saw**

If we want to be effective ambassadors for Christ, we need to ask God to give us the heart that Jesus had for oppressed and distressed people. We see His heart in Matthew 9:36, “Seeing the people, He felt compassion on them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” Jesus goes on to say that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few; thus (v. 38) the disciples should pray for the Lord to send workers into the harvest.

Jesus saw the crowds, perhaps as they approached Him, felt compassion for them, and then gave this charge to His disciples. Presumably, Jesus and the disciples saw the same scene: the approaching crowd of people. But Jesus saw them with different eyes than the disciples.

*Jesus saw people as distressed.* The word means “troubled” or “vexed.” It points to the load of problems that so many people apart from God bear. Do you ever look carefully into people’s faces when you’re in public? If you do, you’ll see a lot of distressed, troubled folk. We will see lonely people. Where do they call come from?

We may not see it or experience it personally but we cannot but be aware that concerns about loneliness have been taken on a whole new dimension with Covid. There is huge anxiety about isolation; the lack of human contact, the inability to be with each other; the many elderly who have been unable to see their families, the pressure on young people and children at this time. The word of the year will no doubt be ‘self-isolation’. Who would have thought that so many people will be ordered to be on their own by Government decree?

*Jesus saw people as dispirited.* The word means, “downcast” or “thrown down.” It points to the utterly helpless and forsaken condition of people. In an old book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Philip Keller describes how sheep can get turned over

on their backs and not be able to get up by themselves again. Such sheep are called “cast” or “cast down” sheep. These sheep flail at the air with their legs, but they can’t get back on their feet without the aid of the shepherd. Left in this condition, helpless and vulnerable to their enemies, they will die after a few hours or days. That is a description of those cast out of a job or businesses that struggle to get on their feet again. It could also be a description of those trapped with their abusers in situations of domestic violence. The world will face a mental health crisis after coronavirus pandemic. The scale of this problem is too serious to ignore, both in terms of every human life that may be affected, and in terms of the wider impact on society. Do we see all this? Are we concerned?

*Jesus saw lost people as sheep without a shepherd.* The Jewish religious leaders should have been shepherding these people, pointing them to God. But instead they were self-righteous and self-seeking, looking down on the common people as sinners. They viewed the people as a bother. But Jesus viewed them as a brother: as sheep needing a shepherd, weighed down by the legalism and rule-bondage that sat on top of them and tied them up in knots.

## **2. We need to feel as Jesus felt.**

The emotional forces with each actor in the drama is being brought out here. It is clear that the mission of Jesus results from sympathy and compassion. This is very far from the accusation of the Pharisees we read in the verse before, that it is by the ruler of the demons that he casts out demons, motivated in other words by darkness rather than light and love.

Jesus sees the people come towards him. Whatever their need, it’s clear that few have found peace. What a contrast with our reading in Romans today where Paul says that through Jesus Christ we have peace with God. But how can they have peace while their leaders are adding to their troubles and burdening them with legalism?

Jesus takes their condition to heart. The sorrows of the people are Jesus’ own sorrows. He dearly loves these burdened souls. He sees them as only he with his marvellously sympathetic heart can, as sheep whose shepherds have abandoned them. They are perishing, fatigued and weary, dejected and deserted. He sees them as sheep that were unprotected, un-looked for and untended- what a picture of lost people, left to themselves.

Note the link in verse 36, "Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them...." The Greek verb translated, "felt compassion," is used frequently of Jesus in the Gospels. It is related to a noun meaning, "inward parts," or, as we might say in the vernacular, "guts." Deep down inside, Jesus felt for these people. He didn't angrily blame them for the mess that they were in, although He could have done so. Rather, Jesus felt compassion for them. He said, "The harvest is plentiful." It's our job description as Christians to go to the harvest field. First we've got to find it.....

"The workers are few." Jesus has changed metaphors here. First, He used the metaphor of sheep. But, now, it's a harvest. The sheep and the shepherd show human need met by God. The good shepherd seeks out lost sheep in need and ministers to them. The harvest and the workers show God's "need" met by people: God uses saved people to save other people. Jesus has chosen to save lost people through those whom He has already saved. He could have used angels, who probably would have been more competent than we are. But He chose to use us. If you are one of Jesus' sheep, He wants you to see yourself as a worker in His harvest. It is not by accident that the very next thing in Matthew's gospel is for Jesus to summon the twelve and appoint them to ministry. Up to this point, Jesus has done all of the ministry while the disciples have watched. But now He gets the disciples involved.

The workers in the Lord's harvest are not just those in so-called "full-time" ministry. Rather, they are those who have seen the people in their need and are stirred to action. Jesus wants you to open your eyes and see the great harvest around you so that you will be those who are both compassionate and angry at the injustice, angry enough that people shouldn't just have handouts but to attack the root cause. The indignation of God in Ezekiel 34 sits with the compassion of the Christ in Matthew 9- 'He saw them as sheep without a Shepherd.'

This says something about the dearth of wise, caring leadership around the world today. We should pray for our leaders that they should be skilled shepherds, able to heal; able to bind up and bring together rather than cause distress; able to heal.

The great Victorian preacher C. H. Spurgeon said that Matthew 9 verse 38 weighed on his heart more than any other text in the Bible! He said that it haunted him perpetually. So I pray that this simple message will haunt us:

***Lord help me to see as Jesus saw and feel as Jesus felt so that I will do as Jesus did.***