

Part 1 - Matthew 9: 35-38.

Jesus is doing what he does best - going from place to place, teaching and healing people everywhere - he goes to them, and he tells them about God and he shows them what God is like.

It is a slightly confusing reading - Jesus calls himself a shepherd, but also a farmer who is reaping wheat or some harvest. Of course harvest can mean lots of things - I guess a wheat farmer harvests wheat, and a shepherd harvests wool or sheep. Bees harvest pollen and nectar, and turn it into honey!

A single bee makes half a teaspoon of honey in its life
So you need a lot of bees for the harvest of a jar of honey!
And it's easy for bees to get more workers, the queen just needs to lay more eggs - up to 2000 a day in the summer!

But what does it mean when Jesus says - we need more workers for the harvest?
And what is our harvest as Christians? as his followers?

The bible talks of a harvest of goodness... - like our fruit is that we are honest, and kind and look after the planet.

or does it mean people - that we should tell people about our faith in God
not tell them to believe in God, or even tell them about our understanding or our picture of God
but to tell them what a difference God makes to them
John Sentamu was the Archbishop of York until last week, and when I was in Birmingham, he was my Bishop there. He was once at a meeting and a child asked him - Why do you believe in God. Bp Sentamu said - we all need friends and when I was a child someone told me that if I wanted it, God would be my friend. So I asked Jesus to be my friend, and he still is today.

God is always faithful

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part 2 - Matthew 10.1 - 8

Here we find out the names of the 12 disciples, or followers - and it's a great quiz question to name them all, or see how many Simons or James there are!
Disciple means learner - and you learn by following, or doing what you see your teacher do..

And it's 12 because they represent the 12 tribes of Israel.. the 12 children of Jacob, who each became a tribe. You may remember from Joseph and the technicolour dream-coat, those 12 brothers went to Egypt, but 400 years later, Moses led them to the promised land. When they got to Canaan, they divided it up between them all.

By Jesus time - the notion of tribes was fairly forgotten and the land wasn't their own anymore anyway - the Romans had captured it. But do you remember John the Baptist - saying - great news, we're going to start again - be baptised - commit yourself to this new thing. The messiah is coming

And then the Messiah, the anointed one, the son of David - Jesus comes - saying - the kingdom of God is with you.. This is the time of Jubilee
This is the new start, the new Israel with the new king David - you remember those Christmas hymns - to you is born this day, one of David's line..
And now here are the new tribes - these 12 disciples - representative of a new kingdom, including all of Israel..

And he appoints these 12 as shepherds - to go to the lost sheep of Israel - they are disciples, learners, so Jesus says be like me, be a shepherd.

(And at this stage - don't go to the gentiles or Samaritans.
for my message starts with those who should know better, it starts with the family
it starts with those who call themselves Jews

- we know later that it will spread to others - that the jews are there as examples of what it means to be God's people, they are there as the demo-version, the showroom model - you too could be like this!).

But here's what I wanted to say about all this..

These 12 are named - they are real people, they are individuals with their own families, stories, hobbies, history.

The early readers might have known people related to them - we are Thaddeus's church, my great grandfather Bartholomew gave us the gospel, told us about Jesus.

And we, the later readers, 2000 years later - we know that they did not choose Jesus, or apply to be disciples and have an interview - but that Jesus chose them, and appointed them. It wasn't their goodness or amazingness, it was God's grace, love and choice.

And just as they were chosen and their names called out, so we have been named and chosen, and welcomed. God wants you. And me.

There's an interesting parallel in Genesis, where Adam names the animals, and there's a sense that until they are named they don't have a place or an identity, but that afterwards they belong. Naming is very important in the Bible.

So Just like when the animals are named - and then they have an identity and a place

When we are named and chosen, **we** belong to the tribe - **we** have an identity - we are **in**

And everyone wants to be in. In a tribe, in a football team, in a village, in a group of friends, in a tribe of teachers, the people who follow this music or band - we are herd animals, and we need to belong. Even to the group of "no tribe!". I was so disappointed when I discovered that anti-fashion was a fashion!

And our job, our calling, our responsibility, as members of Jesus tribe - is to invite others to join the tribe.

Not.. to defend it - really God is big enough to defend himself,

Not to attack others! There's no need.

but to say - come on in..join this tribe - its great..

Freely you have received, freely you were invited to join
so freely invite others...