



3. People of Peace

Luke 10:1-20

So there's a harvest out there ready to be reaped and God has called us, His people to go and bring it in. Harvesting itself is easy, but we need to be streetwise and focussed on the task ahead. OK then, if it's so easy, how do we do it.

Jesus was ever practical as He sent the disciples out two by two before Him. This was a particular situation that worked well in the culture of the time. Jewish evangelists would go out two by two into towns and villages preaching. But so often these travelling rabbis were in it for themselves, building up their reputations and earning money in whatever way they could. But as we'll find, Jesus commands the disciples to represent Him in humility, giving a message of hope.

However, what Jesus says in this passage also gives us clear lessons in how we build relationships with those He is bringing to Himself.

◆ Peace

5 Whenever you go into a house, first say, "Peace be with this house." 6 If someone who is peace-loving lives there, let your greeting of peace remain on that person; if not, take back your greeting of peace.

I don't know if you've noticed the Hebrew on the background of my slides this morning. It's the word Shalom. If you've been to Israel you'll know that Shalom is the greeting you give people. In fact throughout the Middle East, Salaam – the Arabic version – is in common use. When I went to Burundi, people had a similar greeting – Namahoro – May there or is there, peace between us. In Greek there is a similar word Eirene – peace. If you know any Irene's or have Irene in your name – then it's from the Greek Eirene – which means peace and is used in exactly the same way as Shalom.

It's a greeting – it's like the explorer who meets a new tribe and says "We come in peace". But Shalom went a bit further as to religious Jews, life was and still is inseparable part of their religious life. Shalom is about peace – peace between people and peace with God.

Do we want to reap? Our first tool in reaping is Shalom – peace – entering into a right relationship with someone. And that starts by seeing people who haven't trusted Christ – yet – as people. You might think that a strange thing to say but there is a tendency to stereotype people – we call them the lost souls, unbelievers, non-Christians, targets. But we should put faces to them – a husband, a wife, a family member, a friend, a neighbour, a workmate, a stranger. They are people and Jesus calls us into relationship with them – to offer peace. And not in a general sense either. We walk through this world as His ambassadors, His disciples, His representatives. When we seek peace we do so knowing that and being transparent about it because Shalom isn't just about peace between people but the peace that God brings – which is only through Christ whom we represent.

That brings me to two practical points – firstly, never conceal Christ in relationships made. That isn't advice for evangelists, but for every Christian, When you offer peace it's on the basis that you accept them irrespective of where they are (or aren't) in Christ. If you are accepted – great. If you're not it's as Jesus says – that relationship isn't ready yet.

◆ Friendship

7 Stay in that same house, eating and drinking whatever they offer you, for workers should be given their pay. Don't move around from one house to another. 8 Whenever you go into a town and are made welcome, eat what is set before you,

Peace leads to friendship. For these disciples, it was being accepted into a home – becoming part of someone’s life. I believe these words are telling us to accept people for who they are. We make peace, we make friends. The disciples had to accept the hospitality wherever they found people open to them – irrespective of what they got. You can imagine that they may want to move on if the food was badly cooked and the bed lumpy. But no – they were to stay and minister to those who were open to them rather than going to places where they thought that they would be better off personally.

Relationships build where there is shalom and that’s where the Holy Spirit is building is, not where we like or it fits in with our mission strategy. When the disciples found somebody – that’s where they ministered. Why do you think it is that I want us as a Church to listen to God and see what He is doing and whose lives He is touching – because they are the people of peace we need to engage and minister to.

And what was that ministry – it started by accepting the hospitality – listening and accepting someone. How often is it that we want people to come to Christ on our terms, on one of our programmes, in one of our services, in our church. Yet for the disciples it meant going into towns, into homes and accepting people for who they are and for what God was doing in their lives.

No do you see what I said reaping is easy – because it involves something that we can all do – make friends.

Christians have tow problems with this. Firstly, we often have few Christian friends because our lives are based around the church. Secondly because we compartmentalise our Christian faith and think it has nothing to do with friends outside the church – but it does. of you have friends that are not Christians (yet) then God already has some reaping equipment in place. Start to allow Him to use you!

◆ Meet Felt Needs

9 heal the sick in that town,

Tool number 3 in reaping is to meed felt needs. After going into the homes, the disciples would get to know the family and then deal with issues in the family and in the town. You notice the sequence – peace and friendship first. Too often our preaching and teaching is delivered cold on people who scarcely know us and we wonder why they don’t respond. If you want to have some building work done, who are you most likely to engage – a man from Yellow Pages or someone your friends recommend because they have been happy with the work. You know the answer. People most respond to faith because they know someone. I’ve given you this information before but all surveys of new Christians show that the vast majority of people come to Christ through the prayers and witness to family and friends.

And what does friendship do – it meets felt needs. The disciples were called to heal the sick. By their actions they showed the presence and power of God – not in doing stunts but in ministering to real need in the community. In Matthew’s description of the sending out of the 12 Jesus adds heal the sick and drive out demons. The disciples ministered to the bodily and spiritual needs of those they found. And that was before they preached.

A critical practical tip. Pray for your friends. Pray that they may come to Christ. Pray for things in their life. Make every part of their life a subject of prayer. Pray each day for them. In difficult situations, tell them that you are praying for them. Pray that God will give you boldness to pray for them out loud in their presence. Incidentally few fail to appreciate that being done to them, but you get to know your friends of course. When the prayers are (almost inevitably) answered - remind them about the goodness of God. It’s a really effective way of meeting felt needs.

I like the emphasis this church has on engaging the community. Because that on a church level is exactly what Luke 10 is about – bringing peace, building friendship, meeting felt needs. We are heading in the right direction with that. Likewise we are also doing that in our personal relationships too – some have seen that all the skills we have built in caring for one another also work just as well in dealing with those outside the church. People have needs and we can bless them by using the gifts and skills we have to help them.

It’s always worth listening to all the episodes in the series. I know one or two of you thought that in

the first to episodes that I was suggesting that we do something new and abandon what we have been doing – or at least play it down. No such thing.

But what I do believe scripture teaches us is that we need to minister in a clear and focussed way – and that is be recognising what God is doing and locking into that rather than following our own agenda. And what is God's agenda? What's He doing? Good question – because as a church we're just not asking that question. It's time we did. This church needs a prayer revolution. I'm someone with a fairly natural sense of direction and can often find my way around strange places without a map. Sometimes I get hopelessly lost though. It's one thing to have good practice in place, but it's quite another to hit the target.

◆ Proclaim the Kingdom

and say to the people there, "The Kingdom of God has come near you.

And finally, after all that they preached the Gospel. I know there is a saying that is attributed to Francis of Assisi that says something like "Preach the Gospel – use words if necessary" Actually, I think I disagree with that. The bottom line is that if someone is to come to Christ, they need to know what it is about and someone has to explain it to them. That's one of the missing areas of ministry here in this church. We have a few people that know how to lead someone to Christ, but to most it's a mystery. And of course, when people are shown how to do it, they realise it's pretty straightforward.

It's the missing link in many aspects of ministry in this church. We are quite good on the felt needs bit – but in truth we are failing people if they don't realise that they have a real need which needs to be fulfilled in their life - to trust Jesus.

The thing that most Christians most fear is if they start telling people about Jesus that they'll put them off in some way. If you have friendships and meeting of felt needs that haven't been prayed into then I guess that's exactly what will happen. But good friendships are trusting friendships. I said in the first week that if we reap properly this isn't an issue. We just need to be prepared to share Jesus. If we are praying and listening to the voice of God, we know exactly when it's the right time. I often encourage people to pray that they will recognise ripe fruit so they'll know to say the right thing at the right time.

It's a good prayer – because it actually works. The heart of God is for people to accept Christ. If it's our heart, it will resonate with us too.

There we are the tools for a successful reaper – peace – friendship – meeting needs – speaking about Jesus.

He said to them, "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest.