

“Sent from the tent” a sermon based on Genesis 18:1-15 and Matthew 9:35-10:8 preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright on Sunday 14 June 2020.

In light of the readings today, what do followers of Jesus do? Well it seems -

They run towards visitors and welcome them, even when they bring laughable and outrageous news. And in so doing, they discover God has appeared to them.

They give birth to new life in the most unpromising situations.

They are sent to share in the mission of Jesus Christ in our world and to pray for labourers in that mission.

We hear these texts after we have moved to level one. Level One seems a bit like what we had before COVID-19 but with a few changes. But is that all? Is the new normal only a slight adjustment of the old normal?

Earlier in Genesis God made this promise to Abraham - “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” “I will bless you so that you will be a blessing ...” So Abraham and Sarah leave and they arrive in a new place. And they receive news of that blessing, and it’s received because they welcome visitors and offer hospitality. It’s not a subdued welcome. Abraham ran to meet the visitors and bowed down to the ground. Over the last ten weeks, have we arrived at a new country, to receive a new blessing?

As a church we have learned to worship and to offer care in a different way. We have adapted. Every week, there was on average 400 views of our online worship. It seems that once people visited one service, they went looking for another service, so our first service has had about 650 views. And we have received moving stories of what difference those services have made in the lives of people. We are now people who physically gather and people who gather online. We have become part of a digital transition that has been happening in the wider church for many years. Thanks to the offering of hospitality we have received a blessing, and in turn we have become a blessing.

But is that all? What about the wider canvas? In Matthew, disciples become apostles. People who follow Jesus become people sent by Jesus. Proclaim the good news. The reign of God has come near. After ten weeks, where do we see signs of that reign?

Tear Fund UK have identified three shifts in social values emerging, towards ideals more aligned with the reign of God. First, there has been some move from 'I, alone' to 'We, together'. Our interconnectedness and our need for one another has never been clearer. That has led to people offering help to others in creative ways. We've seen new expressions of community with street concerts and street parties – Pacific Street here in Dunedin, about which we will hear shortly. People have taken care not to infect others. And there has been deep concern for those who have felt the brunt of being isolated. Globally, the rapid spread of the disease has also demonstrated how the health and well-being of one of us has implications for all of us. One sign of the reign of God is learning again how deeply connected we are with one another and with the whole of creation.

Second, there has been some move from valuing productivity above all else to valuing life in its other dimensions. We have heard able to hear the sounds of creation. Free online concerts have reminded us of the gift of the arts. People have gathered virtually to sing, including our own choir and choristers. People with inadequate housing have been provided with temporary accommodation. There has been an impetus to find and support those who are lonely and isolated. The patterns of inequality have been starkly revealed again, calling for action. It is obvious that the market economy does not care for people when the economy slumps and thousands lose work. We are learning again the value of support systems and human rights protections. The World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches are saying that now is a time to change our economic frameworks. Improvements may be temporary, but they demonstrate a shift to valuing life over productivity.

Thirdly, there is the hope of moving from making small tweaks to a new way of being. Many are beginning to realise that we have a chance to reshape culture and society. More people are joining this conversation, and there seems in some places an appetite for real change. Black Lives Matter involves a broad cross section of people wanting to address racism. Within our own country there is a new commitment to decolonisation. And behind all this, can we

make a fresh commitment to address climate change. If we can bring urgency to eliminate a virus, can we bring the same urgency to address climate change?

Let's keep looking for the signs of the reign of God around us and let's pray that we will be part of that reign, as we pray for God to send other labourers alongside us. Let's not waste the last ten weeks. So what do followers of Jesus do?

They welcome visitors despite even when they bring laughable news

They see new possibilities where little seems possible, and they give birth to new life.

They understand themselves as sent to share the good news of God's reign.

They keep praying for the God of the harvest to send labourers for the harvest, sensing how the one who prays may be part of the answer.

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