

Sermon for the Trinity 3

First Reading: 2 Kings 5: 1-14 (page 314)

Second Reading: Galatians 6: 1-16 (NT page 117)

Gospel: Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20 (NT page 65)

All Age introduction –

I'd like you to turn to your neighbour and just say one place, person or situation you have seen God working, since you last came to church.

Sermon –

For those of us who have been involved in the Partnership for Mission Church process, this reading is becoming pretty familiar. And so, instead of offering any immediate words of wisdom, I thought I'd tell you a story...

There was once a gardener.

She had grown a most beautiful garden. The flowers bloomed in due season, vegetables grew with abundance, bees buzzed amongst the softly scented lavender and birds nested in the apple trees.

It was a haven of calm and tranquillity; a place of peace, and the gardener loved it very much. She saw how much the garden gave her joy and so she wanted to open it up to other people too, so that they would also know it's peace and joy.

So she unlocked the gate and waited in the garden for people to come

But no-one came.

So she made a poster, telling people that the garden was open and that all were welcome. She pinned the poster on the gate and waited.

But still no-one came.

The gardener felt sad. There was so much that this garden could bring to the community, if only they came in and realised it. She could teach people how to garden, she could share the vegetables with those who were hungry, should could give a reflective space to those with busy lives. Her garden (and her) could offer so much; why didn't they come?

So she made some fliers about the garden. And she left the garden behind and went out in her neighbourhood. And she gave out some fliers and she told people about her garden and all the things it could offer them. Sometimes the people she met seemed more receptive, and she quickly asked what else she could do for them. Sometimes the people she met said they'd like to come, sometime...

The next day, when she opened her garden, she was more hopeful. Surely people would come today.

But no-one did.

She felt despondent and wondered why the community couldn't see the gift she was offering.

But then, as she sat on her garden bench, a robin fluttered down onto the grass. She knew every part of her garden, every bird and every nest. She knew there was no robin's nest in her garden. As he tugged a succulent worm from the lawn, she wondered where he had come from; and as he flew away again, she wondered where he was going back to.

With a spirit of renewed curiosity, she went back out into the neighbourhood.

A couple of houses down she met some children playing in their garden.

'Have you seen Mr Robin?' she asked.

'No' they replied. 'But come and see what we have seen...'

And they showed her their nature area, which at first glance was just a patch of mud and decaying tree stumps. And they showed her how to find woodlice and which were the best leaves for butterfly eggs and a dark musty piles of leaves where Mrs Hedgehog made her bed.

After a while, the gardener moved on; but before she left, she made sure she'd found at their names and told them hers.

Further down the street she met an elderly gentleman in his garden; he called out to her;

'would you like some runner beans? I've got too many for just myself'

And though the gardener started to wonder if they'd be as good as her runner beans, she nevertheless accepted warmly. And found out his name too. And she noticed that he seemed a little sad when she left, so she made her mind up to go back again.

And on she walked.

At times she paused to ask someone the name of a particular flower they were growing and invariably they were more than happy to tell her the story of their garden. The gardener discovered that the community already knew quite a lot of gardening...

At the allotment she found a whole group of other gardeners, swapping seeds and tips for growing the biggest marrow and the gardener pocketed some of the seeds and promised to try them out.

And on she walked.

After she'd walked for a long time in the heat, the gardener started to feel tired and a little faint. She rang the bell of a rather ramshackled bungalow and asked she could sit for a moment in the shade of a beautiful magnolia in the front garden. Of course, the owner replied and as she sat, the owner even brought her out a glass of cold lemonade and it was by far the most delicious thing she had ever tasted.

When she eventually arrived back in her garden, it looked a little emptier than it had before. She hadn't found Mr Robin, but she'd certainly found out all sorts of other things about the place she lived.

And so the next day she went out again.

And the next...

And each day after that she went out into her neighbourhood and discovered all the gardens where everyone else spent their time. Sometimes she took a trowel and helped them out a little, if they asked for it. And sometimes she took some radishes, or courgettes or a bunch of roses from her own garden and shared them with the people she met. But often she didn't take anything and relied on the kindness of strangers to provide her with a glass of water and a bit of shade if she got too hot.

Of course, sometimes people said no and turned away quickly at this rather strange woman. But she'd just give them a quiet nod and travelled on to the next place. And when she did meet someone who welcomed her; she never failed to shake their hand and find out their name and tell them hers.

This went on for months and months; till the leaves started falling off the leaves and there was a frosty chill in the air and the glasses of cold water were replaced with steaming mugs of tea.

Then one morning, when she woke up, something had changed.

She opened the curtains, and there, in her garden were all her neighbours.

The children were digging in the corner, and the elderly gentleman was cutting back her raspberry canes and a young couple were raking up some leaves. And countless others were just sitting, enjoying the space and chatting.

For a moment, the gardener was taken aback. She wasn't quite sure she liked the new patch of mud, or if the canes were pruned in quite the way she had been planning and well, there was a lot more noise than she'd expected...

She wasn't quite sure... for a moment.

Then she looked heavenwards, laughed quietly as at a private joke, and joined in.

I am sure that most of you will have seen where this is going...

The model of mission that Jesus presents to the 70 (or 72 depending on your translation) in today's gospel was as radical then as it is now.

It's a model that requires vulnerability and an acceptance that we don't have all the answers. It's about spending time with people of peace, eating and drinking whatever is provided by them. It might be about helping people, on their terms, and it definitely involves presence and attentiveness. Most of all, as Sam Wells might say, it's about delighting in all the places you can find the kingdom of God, even when Christ isn't being named.¹

It's about seeing what God is up to in the world. Seeing his face reflected back at you in the faces of the people you meet. And celebrating it. And joining in.

¹ Samuel Wells, *Incarnational Mission: Being with the World*

It's actually pretty simple!

In our Old Testament reading we heard one of my favourite stories, that of Naaman, a commander in the army of king Aram. Naaman has leprosy and one of the slave girls in his wife's possession, sees his plight, and points towards the one who could cure him. I love the story for that simple intervention of a child who had no reason to love her master, but who still wanted healing for him. And then, we have the almost laughable scene where Naaman refuses to do what Elisha has asked and it takes another servant to say "if the prophet commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it?" In a world a complexities, sometimes the answer really is that simple.

And though the Partnership for Mission Church process has come with reams of paperwork and requires a whole dictionary to itself, what it's asking us to do is really very simple. It's asking us to go out, to pay attention and to do join in.

In fact, it's asking us to do what we are probably doing already!

At the end of every service, we are sent out into that world. We say.. 'Go in peace...'

We are sent out to love. And at the heart of love is relationship. We are sent out into our homes, neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces to make friendships, to enter into partnerships and to be present in God's kingdom. And then each Sunday we are gathered back in; gathered to celebrate all that we have discovered and all that has enriched us since we last met.

At the beginning of the service we celebrated some of those ways we had seen God at work.

So my challenge for you this week is a simple one... To be even more attentive as you go about your daily life, to see where God is working in this community and to bring it back for us to rejoice in.