

Sermon on Sunday 18 October 2026 at St Andrew's by Dave Shaw, Lay Reader in training

Readings: Timothy 4. 5-17 & Luke 10. 1-9

Jesus sends out the 70

Good morning, St Andrew's.

This gospel story of the 70 disciples being sent out on a work experience trip is probably very familiar. However, as I looked more closely, I found that there were parts that I didn't completely understand. Parts that I've had to research and really think about.

So, what actually happened? Well, Jesus sent the 70 disciples out ahead of him to all the towns and villages he was about to visit. But what were the disciples being sent to do?

Luke 10. 5-9: Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" 6 And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; 9 cure the sick who are there,

and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."

So, there's something about peace and quite a lot about eating. But why?

Well, for thousands of years, Jews have been greeting each other with the blessing, "Peace unto you," or in the Hebrew, "Shalom aleichem," with the other person responding, "Unto you peace," or "Aleichem shalom."

So, on the surface, from the words spoken when people met, every Jew was a person of peace. Of course, that is only on the surface, so Jesus is telling his disciples to look more closely at the deeper response. When the disciple told the householder that they had come to tell them about Jesus, did the householder welcome them, or did they tell them to clear off?

If the person is at peace with God and with their fellow humans, and welcomed the news that Jesus was about to visit, and invited the disciples into their home, then the disciples were to stay with them.

What strikes me most is that Jesus doesn't say that they should find the richest or most influential person in the village and stay there. He doesn't say that they should find the leader of the synagogue and stay with him. They are to look for a person willing to receive God's message and his messengers.

So, when they have found their accommodation, what next? They were to eat whatever food they were given. That doesn't sound so bad, does it? Actually, having worked way out in the African bush for over six years, I can assure you that it is not **always** that easy. I worked with the Zande people and they would eat virtually anything that walked, crawled, slithered or flew. In fact, for the Zande people there were only two species that were firmly **off** the menu: colobus monkeys (because they believed the spirits of their ancestors were in the monkeys), and the sitatunga, a very rare antelope (because they believed that it would give you leprosy). All other species like baboon and aardvark and cane rat were on the menu, so mealtimes **could** be challenging, although cane rat is actually beautiful meat. (I can just imagine your conversations this lunch time over the dinner table. "So darling, what did you learn at church today?" "I learned that cane rat is lovely meat.")

Of course, for these early followers of Jesus, the issues would have been different because the food was kosher so, lucky them, no baboons or aardvarks or cane rats! However, in the Middle East of Jesus' day, eating meals together was a covenant thing, a sign of fellowship and close relationship, so it was very, very important. That is why the gospels frequently tell us about the meals Jesus ate. They don't usually tell us **what** Jesus ate: the focus is completely on **who** Jesus ate with, and that was what so upset the Pharisees, because Jesus ate with people they regarded as "sinners". In the Pharisees' eyes, righteous people weren't meant to do that. So, when Jesus tells the

disciples to eat with strangers, people whose reputation they didn't know, he is telling them to accept people and respect people as brothers and sisters, no matter what their background might be. All that was needed was a receptivity to the gospel.

Is that relevant to us in Britain today? Well, the simple fact that I have never heard any preacher mention this aspect of the passage suggests that it may be a blind spot for us. We, the followers of Jesus, are called to have relationships that are deep and rich and including of strangers, in a society where such things are often quite rare. We aren't meant to research the backgrounds of people to see if they are good enough and worth our time. A receptivity to the gospel message is all that's needed. God loves and values all people, and we are called to do likewise.

But what might that involve in Hertford today? Well, St Andrew's Church has an amazing range of events to invite people to to share time together. As well as the wide variety of church services, there are things like the Senior Lunch. There are folk music gigs. There's handbell ringing. There's even, and I never thought I would be saying this, there's even Sing-Along-a-Dolly. Alan, is that your doing? There's a rumour that you will turn up in a blond wig and sequins. Is that true? Or, even more mind-blowing, than the thought of Alan in a blond wig, we've had zip-wiring teddy-bears over at St Mary's. That's such a brilliant idea I've passed it on to my older daughter who's a children's worker in a church near Oxford and she's already looking at whether their church tower is suitable. You guys have brilliant ideas for fun activities, **so invite people along.**

Relationships matter. Friendships matter. They are a vital part of God's kingdom. And, yes, even crusty old liturgy-loving Anglicans are allowed to have fun.

As Alan often says at the end of the service, "Chat to someone you have never chatted to before over coffee." That is something this church gets very right. It matters just as much in 21st Century Britain as it did in the ancient Middle East. Perhaps even more so with the current epidemic of loneliness.

But beyond building relationships with other people, what were the disciples meant to do? They were told to heal the sick and tell them that the kingdom of God was at hand. Oh great! Heal the sick... But **I'm not** a doctor. Tell them the Kingdom of God is at hand... But **I'm not** a preacher.

The way I see it, when Jesus sent out his disciples to do this, he wasn't setting them an impossible task, and he wasn't setting them up to fail. The whole point is that **God** would provide the power if they were obedient. They **could** do what he was telling them to do. Jesus was simply telling them to say and do the things they had seen him say and do. They should pray for people to be healed and also tell people about all the wonderful things they had seen Jesus say and do.

Have things changed since then? Well, not really. We can all pray for people to be healed. I can't guarantee that we will always see the result we long for, but I **can** guarantee

that if we prayed for healing more often, we would see healings more often.

And what about telling people about Jesus? We aren't all called to be high flying theologians who can explain all sorts of mysteries to other people. What we **are** all called to do, however, is be **witnesses** to the Jesus who has made a difference in our lives and can make a difference in the lives of the people we meet. We need to tell people of the things this Jesus has done; our answers to prayer. And, we can tell them of the things this same Jesus did back when he walked the dusty paths of ancient Palestine.

Those of you who read the parish magazine will have seen the tagline at the bottom of most pages: Know the Story; Share the Story; Live the Story.

The passage we have read today shows what that meant to the 70 people Jesus sent out all those years ago. **Our** challenge is to put that into practice in Hertford today. In our own lives we need to Know the Story: Share the Story: and Live the Story.



*A Samaritan family
eating the Passover*