

Be Prepared – Trinity 1 Sunday 14th June 2020 – Reverend Sophie Whitmarsh

All good sermons apparently have no more than three points. However, today has 4 I'm afraid. But, I have entitled them all, "Be prepared", so that should make it slightly easier!! 1. Be prepared to have your heart broken. 2. Be prepared to pray and ask for help. 3. Be prepared to do some work. 4. Be prepared to have it thrown back in your face.

These past few weeks we have seen extraordinary images and events unfurling on our television screens. The death of George Floyd, an horrific act of hate that has shaken a world that was resting on its laurels. The jailing of young adults who seem to think that Hitler and his regimes are something to aspire to and the killing of an innocent autistic Palestinian. These are just some of the images that have been filling our screens. I don't know about you, but I have cried, lamented, and have felt ashamed that we still live in a society that oppresses people because of the colour of their skin, and lets down our younger generation by allowing narratives of hate to filter into their psyche. My heart has absolutely poured out over these images over these last few weeks, and that has led me to a strong sense of conviction, that something needs to be done.

Be prepared to have your heart broken.

As Jesus made his way around the region of Galilee proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, he came across many people who were hurting or helpless, oppressed, exhausted, and without direction or a leader. Jesus poured out his heart for them, he lamented.

They were sheep without a shepherd, a metaphor which describes the relationship between God and his people, but also their need for human leadership under God. A metaphor that is widely used throughout the bible.

Ezekiel 34:1-16 says.... "you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not bought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd"

Jesus' heart is breaking for the scattered sheep of Israel.

Be prepared to pray and ask for help

Jesus was committed to the cause, but he knew that he could not spread the good news alone.

Jesus' words which act as a prayer "the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."

Or perhaps as a paraphrase.. There are so many who are seeking, there are so many oppressed, there are so many that need to hear the good news, and yet there are not enough to do the deed. I cannot do this on my own. Lord help me, send me workers.

There is something reassuring about Jesus asking for helpers. I have no doubt that God could very well have done this on his own, but he wants us to be part of the story. We too must recognise when we need help and be prepared to ask for it.

Be prepared to do some work and be a shepherd.

And so, as an answer to the prayer Jesus picks out 12 of his followers. Gives them an authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and sickness. A reminder and continuation of what Jesus himself had previously done.

Jesus sends them with very specific instructions, they are to go to the lost sheep of Israel. Not to the gentiles, or to the Samaritans, but to Israel. It is likely that the restriction was more of a geographical one, given that the focus of mission expanded to gentiles etc after Jesus' death and resurrection. But at this point, Jesus wanted them to focus on the lost sheep of Israel.

Be prepared to have it all thrown back in your face.

Like any good leader, Jesus gives them a pep talk before they head out. Travel light he says, trust in Gods provision, by taking very little with you, just the bare essentials. Money won't be required, because they should expect appropriate hospitality in return for their labour.

Of course, there will be some who are open to the message that the disciples bring (the worthy) and some who are not (the unworthy). If they are worthy, the blessing of peace will rest upon them, and if they are unworthy, it shall not be heard, and will instead be returned to sender...

Some will actively oppose the disciples, and to those, Jesus tell them to shake the dust from their feet. Walk away, move on, don't allow the dust to collect. There will be persecution, because of Jesus' name.

I do not want to be like the shepherds that God was so angry with in Ezekiel. I don't want to be ignoring the plight of my fellow humans. As followers of Christ, we all need to be prepared to have our hearts broken, to feel the pain of our oppressed brothers and sisters, whatever that oppression looks like. It is part of who we are as followers of Jesus. We should be prepared to pray and ask for help and guidance, to recognise when we cannot do things under our own steam. We need to be prepared to commit to working, to shepherding sheep who are lost, hurting and helpless. And, we need to be prepared to have it all thrown back in our faces, but to be able to stand up, dust ourselves off, move on and try again.

Heavenly Father, break our hearts, with the things that break yours. Give us courage to see and to fight injustice, give us perseverance, when the going gets tough, and give us grace Lord to keep going even when we are persecuted and ignored. Amen.