

ARCHDEACON'S VISITATION CHARGE 2010

Archdeacon of Nottingham - Peter Hill

Luke 10:1-12

1 After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. 3 Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. 5 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." 10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 11 "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near." 12 I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

Well, what a **momentous couple of weeks politically**:

- A lot of coming and going, speaking and listening, one to another.
- Now we have a new Prime Minister and the beginnings of a new government,
- and maybe a new political era of stronger listening and collaboration.
- Perhaps an example for us in the church? We'll see!

The story is told of President Franklin D Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said.

One day, during an ambassadors' reception, he tried an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." The guests responded with smiles and "Marvellous Mr President! Keep up the good work sir. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir."

It was not till the end of the line, while greeting an ambassador from South America, that his words were really heard. Nonplussed, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "I'm sure she had it coming, Mr President."

Good listening is essential for good leadership.

For the church of Christ to be effective in mission it must first be willing to **graciously receive and prayerfully listen.**

John Saxbee, the Bishop of Lincoln puts it succinctly:
“Go and tell, but not until you have been and listened.”
That is his motto for evangelism.

It is also the heart of this year’s Archdeacon’s Charge to all churchwardens and clergy present.

“Go and tell, but not until you have been and listened.”

It’s there in our reading tonight from Luke 10, **the sending of the 72**. It may not be obvious at first, but let me précis it for you. In essence Jesus’ command to the 72 he sends out ahead of him is simple and direct:

- Pray as you go
- Go as you are
- Stay where you’re welcome
- Speak peace to those who offer hospitality
- Eat what you’re given
- Heal the sick
- Tell them the kingdom of God has come near.

Do you see the order:

Pray, go, receive, act, speak

“Go and tell, but not until you have been and listened.”

Jesus already **modelled** this in Chapter 8 as the newly chosen 12 apostles and “**some women**” 8:2 (Luke always makes special mention of the female disciples) follow him as he brings the good news to the villages of Galilee. They listen, watch and learn.

Then in Chapter 9 **Jesus, ever the Gospel strategist**, sends out the 12 with power and authority to do what

they have seen him do. And now in Chapter 10, he sends out 72, a number symbolic in the Jewish tradition of a universal task, on the same model and with the same instructions. **The ripples and waves of the Gospel are extended a stage at a time.**

Don’t let anyone tell you that the church should not have a mission strategy. Jesus was mission strategic from first to last. The ripple model here in Luke 10 is passed on to us today.

- **Our call as clergy and wardens**, as disciples and leaders of the church is to ensure we make a difference for the Kingdom of God in our parishes, communities and networks. So that we earn the right, as in tonight’s reading to say to people, “**The kingdom of God has come near you.**”
- **Our duty** is to model the strategy: to teach, train and support our congregations to do the same.

But we always need to **pray and listen first**, adapting our methodology to new circumstances, nationally and locally.

However we voted in the election, we all know we are in for **savage cuts** and the reduction of local services. Many of those cuts will hit the most vulnerable in our parishes hardest. It is inevitable. In effect the “**Welfare State**” is about to contract. All Local Authorities, as well as our new Government, are already making plans to do so, including our own.

There will be immense challenge and opportunity for voluntary organisations to **fill the gaps** in the community provision left behind. This is especially so for faith communities. Of course it was us, the church, that started the Welfare State and education in the first place!

All 3 major political parties promised in their appeal for our votes that they would support the church in having a bigger role in serving communities in the future. We are, after all, by far the biggest voluntary organisation in the land. As Anglicans with parish churches we are the only organisation who is well placed to serve almost every community and we already do so.

This past month our political leaders have called for **our trust and our discipleship**. None of them got the number of followers they hoped.

- They accused one another of having policies that were either unclear or impractical.
- None of them were able to spell out the full cost of our discipleship.
- It was not easy to see the small print.

With Jesus the cost of discipleship is always writ large, the strategy is clear. Nowhere more so than in our NT reading from **Luke 10**.

In this diocese **Serving Community** is one of our 4 mission values. More importantly it is a **command** from our Lord to love our neighbours and respond to those in need, especially the poor, the elderly, the very young, the sick and the stranger in our midst (NAT) .

We are to **“Go and tell, and act but not until we have been and listened.”**

It’s a ripple effect that serves the community.

It’s spiritual, it’s practical, it’s efficient and it’s effective
And it doesn’t always need huge resourcing!

The imperative is to **go**. The church is not the church unless it is going out into the world...

The Church is a verb not a noun.

The Gk for church: *ekklesia* derives from a verb that means "to summon forth," or "to call out from."

As we go we need to **give priority to listening**.

- To **listen to the world** in which we find ourselves: understand the contexts and needs of our communities,
- **Listen to the people** we live and work alongside, including one another
- And in the midst of it all **listen to God**.

And there are times when clergy and wardens should make time to do that prayerful listening together with one another and with God. It still surprises me when I hear that some incumbents and wardens rarely meet together on their own, and never pray together!

“Go and tell, but not until you have been and listened”

Jesus was always the great listener. We see him doing it again and again, like on the Emmaus Road, that terrific resurrection story when he asks the 2 downcast disciples, **“What are you discussing with one another while you walk along?”**

The wise leader always listens. **In leading our parishes we must dare to listen first before we plan and act.**

But it is more than listening to our context and our people, we must also listen for God. We know that God's ways are not always our ways and having listened it takes discernment and courage to act aright.

One of the most transforming books I have read recently is by Stephen Cottrell: **"Do nothing to change your life"** In essence he makes the point that we all need a certain amount of time doing nothing in particular to have things occur to us, to let our minds think, to let God work on our spirit with his Spirit. If we are to truly meet with the Lord and do the listening needed. It's a very challenging book if you are activist by nature like me. And it's a theme he began to develop in: **Hit the Ground Kneeling.** **I commend them both to you all.**

I also recently came across a comment on the well known verse, **"Be still and know that I am God!" Psalm 46:10** which has struck a cord with me!

In the Latin Vulgate translation of the scriptures the word used here is "vacate" = vacate , vacation.
Let me paraphrase the verse from the Latin:
Take a vacation from being God and let God be God.
That has got to be first base in the art of listening!

Good leadership comes out of a well of contemplation

An overactive archdeacon went to see his spiritual director and told him all his troubles. The wise spiritual guide leaned back in his chair and advised the archdeacon to sleep more.

"Why?" asked the archdeacon.

"It will limit your opportunity to do further damage", came the reply!

The same may apply to some of us: archdeacon, clergy and wardens!

We cannot truly **go** and move into the space Jesus offers until we have prayerfully listened to our community, to the people in it, to our God and it is best done out of rest and refreshment.

So:

"Go and tell, but not until you have been and listened"

That is the Charge for 2010.