

Do not be afraid

He was in his early 30's. He spoke up for the ordinary people – those who had no voice. He challenged the rich and the powerful and called for equality. He was a man of faith in God. He was seen as a threat to the establishment. He was brought to trial and found guilty. He was charged with sedition. The rulers were anxious to maintain the status quo. He was found guilty and given an excessive penalty. He was, in effect, cut off and banished to another land. He was to die in his early 30's, a lonely man, outside the city gates, he suffered much in his short life. It was a short life which has had a long legacy.

Who am I speaking about?

You would be right to think that I'm speaking about Jesus.

But, I'm actually speaking about another young man, who gave his life to championing the cause of the marginalised and the weak.

His name is Thomas Muir and this was his church, in fact he was a young elder here. I'm sure there would have been interesting Session Meetings when he was around.

Thomas Muir has been recognised as the Father of modern democracy, both here in Scotland, and in Australia.

But what intrigues me about his life is Thomas Muir as a person.

Where did his radical ideas come from?

Where did he find strength to endure all that he had to?

Who inspired him?

What was his reason for being?

I would like to think that his Christian faith played an extremely important role in him as a person.

I would like to think that he saw in Jesus, a true reformer, a man burning with love and justice.

Faith obviously meant a lot to Thomas.

In fact he studied divinity at University before switching to law and there is the dichotomy in Thomas Muir, that rich mixture of grace and law.

He was a man of the people, but an educated man, who had the desire to see radical change.

Because he was such a threat to the powers of his day, he was sent to Botany Bay in Australia for fourteen years, but after three years he managed to escape and eventually ended up in France, the land of revolution, where he was warmly welcomed. But his journey took its toll and his fame was to dwindle and he was to die a young man.

When he was in Botany Bay, Thomas didn't idle himself, he undoubtedly saw this as his mission and even there, as a prisoner, his bible was at hand, as he gathered fellow prisoners together on a Sunday morning and led them in worship. No doubt feeding their souls with faith and grace and pointing them in the direction of the love, mercy and justice of God. It is reported that he also spent time copying portions of the Scriptures to be distributed amongst the convicts.

So it is fitting that this window is here as a tribute to Thomas Muir, and that each year, in Bishopbriggs, there is a week dedicated to his memory, and that we have a local school called after him, and that his memory lives on some 200 years later.

Cadder folks are rightly proud that this was where it began for Thomas Muir and that his legacy of justice and democracy still lives on.

Robbie Burns poem *A Man's a Man for a' That* – he may have been inspired by the life of Thomas Muir.

*Then let us pray that come it may,
 (As come it will for a' that,)
 That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,
 Shall bear the gree, an' a' that.
 For a' that, an' a' that,
 It's coming yet for a' that,
 That Man to Man, the world o'er,
 Shall brothers be for a' that.*

Let us sing now the beautiful hymn, *Amazing Grace*, how sweet the sound...

Do not be afraid

Today the sermon is coming from the Campsies. Jesus did preach on occasions in the synagogue, but more often he was on the hills, and in the countryside, teaching his disciples. That's how Rabbis taught their followers, they would follow their teacher around listening to him.

So, today we are going to be considering Jesus teaching his disciples about mission, and more likely than not it was up a hill. So, if it's good enough for the Master, it's good enough for me.

Come and follow me up the Campsies and listen to the Word!

Last week, we considered the words of Jesus – *Follow me and I will make you fishers of men*. We considered the window that Sir Hugh Reid gifted to this church, in memory of his Son James and all the young men of this area who lost their lives in the Great War.

These young men heard the words of Lord Kitchener, *Your country needs you*, and so they packed their bags and joined the army and went out to serve in mission. The mission was to fight for the freedom of their country: to sacrifice everything, even their own lives.

Today we are thinking about what Following Jesus looks like?

In our reading today from Matthew's gospel, chapter 10, read for us by Gavin and Fiona, Jesus is preparing his disciples for mission. He is getting them ready to be sent out into the world in mission.

Jesus knew that if his Mission was to continue, then it would only happen when a group of people, enabled by His Spirit, were willing to commit themselves to it.

Chapter 10 begins with the words; *Jesus called the twelve disciples together and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness*. He then lists the twelve disciples entrusted with this task.

So he is sending them out to do battle, to drive out evil, and to heal. This is the original commission for the twelve – to come and follow and to go into battle. This was their mission field.

War has been declared and it begins with Christ, the General of this small army, and his twelve disciples.

Verse 5, and following, we discover that Captain Jesus gives them specific instructions as he sends them out. *Go to the lost people of Israel* v6. Mission begins at home: we have a mission field on our doorstep. We don't need to be thinking about foreign lands, when we have people in need of Christ's mercy right here and now on our doorstep.

Where might that mission field be for us? John Knox once said, *Give me Scotland or I die!* Knox's prayer was not an arrogant demand, but the passionate plea of a man willing to die for the sake of the mission of Jesus.

Jesus' message, was simply, *Go and preach, The Kingdom of heaven is near!* They were to go with urgency. There was no time to delay. Now was the moment, and something spectacular was about to happen. The Mission had begun.

This mission, that they were called to, was to reflect the mission of Jesus. Jesus had been demonstrating to them what this ministry looks like – teaching, healing and preaching, and now they are to do likewise. The new recruits have to take up the fight and follow their master to the front line.

No longer is it about standing at a distance, enjoying the view, watching the Master, now they are called to go.

In fact these are the very words Jesus used. Go and preach, heal and drive out. They were not to live their Christian faith in a bubble, extracted from the world, safe and comfortable. No, the time had come for them simply to go.

Like little fledgling birds being pushed out the nest by the mother, so Jesus is sending them into the world to do his mission.

What were they to take with them?

Nothing...

V 10, Do not carry any money...do not even wear a beggar's shirt...look for people of peace, who will support you in each town.

Literally, mission for them was about stripping away everything that they would be dependent upon to help them. Why? So that they would be totally dependent upon their Heavenly Father, who knows what they need already.

This mission is about total trust in their Heavenly Father...

Who is to go?

All of them, everyone had a responsibility for mission. As we know, they were all very different, some were extroverts like Peter, who would no doubt confront people with the gospel. *Listen up!* You can hear him say.

Some would be like John, more reserved, and more likely to win folks over with his smile and gentle approach, but they were a team and this was a joint mission.

This has something to teach us a church - mission is the responsibility, not just of the few but of us all. We are all called to Mission, and God has given us all our unique personalities which we can use to witness to Christ.

Jesus sends them out in twos – perhaps he carefully selected who would go with who. Perhaps Peter and John would make a good team, both complementing each other, and so a good balance.

We are not meant to do mission alone, but we do it together for our support and encouragement.

Jesus told them of the dangers. This was not going to be easy and may cost them their very lives. He said that they were like sheep going amongst wolves... v16. They were to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves. Mission for Jesus is to be spirit led, it is not being like Rambo or going in with all guns blazing, but good mission will take prayer and planning – wisdom and strategy.

For them, the Mission of Jesus was going to be controversial and cause disruption, even to family life. Families will become divided over it. The disciples will be charged, and tried, and found guilty of sedition, speaking against the authorities. But they were not to be afraid for they would be given the words to speak at the right time, from the Spirit of the Father.

Three times in this passage these words were used: *Do not be afraid*. This leads us to the words of our reading this morning, *do not be afraid of what men can do...v26*. Why? Because there is a day that everything will be brought to light. There is a day of justice coming, when all things shall be measured on God's scales and everybody will see the miscarriages of justice – the injustice in the world.

So do not be afraid of who can kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can kill both body and soul in hell.

These words were said to encourage the disciples going into Mission, what Jesus was telling them was that God was with them. As they went out to do his mission they were not to fear man, because ultimately God was on their side.

This is always a constant for people doing mission of every generation, that we need not fear what man can do, because someone greater than man is with us.

He then points them to the care of his Heavenly Father and uses the illustration of two sparrows being sold for a penny. Jesus is highlighting that in human terms these sparrows are worthless, yet in God's eyes they are precious. He knows even when one sparrow falls from the sky.

So, he adds, aren't you worth more than these sparrows.

So, this passage gets to the heart of Christian discipleship. It is urgent, demanding and costly. It is crucial...the church will die without mission.

The coronavirus has launched us into mission. Like it or not, the church has been called into a battle and, as in Jesus' day, the church is called to preach the good news, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near; it is calling us to reach out and bring healing, and to fight against evil and injustice. For this is what the church was created for.

We are like a ship, called to sail the seas of this world, but when we are moored in a safe harbour, our ship will become what it was not intended for. Only when it leaves the harbour, and faces the challenges of the wind and the sea, will it accomplish its goal and reach its destination.

Well, we certainly have been sent out of the harbour this year, the safety of our buildings has been compromised and we are out there in the ocean, uncertain of when calmer conditions will return. But was that not exactly what the disciples faced in the early church, and what generation after generation of Christians have faced, as they fought the battles of the opposition of their generation?

Yes we are in a storm, but the good news is that Christ is in the story with us. Just as the disciples faced the great storm on Lake Galilee, and didn't know what to do until they turned to Jesus and woke him up. Don't you care that we are about to die, they said, and Jesus calmed the wind and the sea and he said to them, *O you of little faith.*

So, what's it going to be for you and me?...status quo...do what we've always done, stay safe in the harbour, hoping that God will bring revival? Or are we going to see this coronavirus as an opportunity to hear again God's word to go... and to reach out, and to heal, and to bring in his Kingdom?

That's the challenge to all God's people. It is a great challenge, for we may have to leave behind many precious things, as the disciples of old had to...Jesus said to them, *do not take anything for the journey.* Why? Because it would distract them from their mission.

What are the things in our Church might be a distraction to the mission of Jesus, rather than a support?

Go, said Jesus, and rely solely upon the grace and mercy of God, and go to the lost people.

May God be gracious to us and enable us to do as Jesus instructed his disciples.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.