

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity

Exodus 19: 2-8; Romans 5: 1-8; Matthew 9: 35 – 10: 8

St James, Shirley & St Johns, Tidbury Green. 14 June 2026

### **Sermon: Knowing and Growing**

You know that summer has arrived when – no, nothing to do with the weather – when the TV is packed full of sport. Great for me – horrendous for others.

Someone once said that Christianity is not a spectator sport — and that rings true for me. You can't simply sit in the stands and admire Jesus from a distance. The more we come to know him, the more we find ourselves drawn onto the pitch: sharing his compassion, joining his mission, playing our part in his team. Discipleship is always both: knowing Christ and going for Christ. Today's gospel shows us that rhythm in action.

### **Ready to Go**

In this reading, Matthew shows us a turning point in Jesus' ministry. Up to now, the disciples have mostly been watching — watching Jesus teach and preach, watching him heal the sick, watching him respond with compassion to crowds and stand firm before critics. But now, in this moment, Jesus does something new. He entrusts them with the very work they've been watching him do. He tells them to go.

They are not going unprepared. They have learned by being close to him. They have absorbed his way of seeing people, his way of responding, his way of bringing God's life into ordinary places. Now Jesus identifies key people, gives them authority, and sends them out. He forms a community, nurtures their faith, and then gives them not just a task but a vocation.

That rhythm — gathered, nurtured, sent — is the heartbeat of Christian life and has shaped the Church from that day to this. We learn Christ, we grow in Christ, and then we discover the ways we are called to serve the world around us. It is faith and mission, discipleship and vocation.

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It's also striking that Jesus doesn't ask them to do everything at once. He sends them first to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." This line has sparked much debate — is Jesus being exclusive, ignoring those who aren't Jewish? But that's not what's happening here. This is about priorities. The time would come when the whole world would hear the gospel, but that would require more than a handful of disciples. That was the work of the Holy Spirit. The first step was the people of Israel — the communities around Jesus.

Jesus wasn't expecting mass conversions. He knew it would be a few here, a few there, a few in the next village, a few over the hill. And when the time came, those few would become a few more, and then a community, and then a movement, and eventually a people — a family.

And besides, it is simply impossible to go from nothing to everything. Modern life pretends otherwise. We demand instant solutions and instant success. But we are called to be different. Patience is one of the Spirit's gifts. Jesus knew it would take time to build his Church. No church, and no disciple, can do everything. When we try, we burn out, spread ourselves thin, and end up doing very little well. Jesus shows us that mission needs focus.

### **The Harvest**

Jesus tells them they are going into a harvest. He looks at the crowds and sees people who are hungry — hungry for meaning, hungry for hope, hungry for something deeper than the quick fixes and fads of the world. And I think that's still true today.

For a long time — from the 1990s into the 2010s — the loudest voices were those of the "new atheism," insisting that faith was irrelevant, unbelievable, a relic of the past. But that moment has passed. New atheism, for all its noise, could not satisfy the deeper longings of the human heart.

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St Augustine famously wrote, *“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”* That rest — that search for truth, purpose, meaning — cannot be satisfied by knowledge or emotion alone. It needs a spiritual dimension. And because atheism cannot supply that, a kind of spiritual vacuum has opened in our society.

And nature abhors a vacuum. Into that space has poured all sorts of things — some from other faith traditions, some from vague spiritualities, some from shallow or superficial movements that lack depth or roots. Many people I speak to describe themselves as “spiritual” but are still searching.

More troublingly, extremist political groups have begun speaking into that spiritual void, using Christian language to cloak messages that are the very opposite of the gospel. Next Sunday, an extremist group plans a march outside New Street Station. Our bishops have asked us to pray — for those who feel vulnerable or intimidated, and against the forces of racism, hatred, hostility, and division.

And yet, amidst all this, there is good news. In the last few months I’ve had so many conversations with people who have wandered into church, searching for something real, deep, and meaningful. The harvest in Shirley — and in Birmingham — is plentiful.

### **Labourers**

So what Jesus needs is labourers — not just people who quietly live good lives, but people willing to help others take their next step towards God. People who will share what they’ve found. People who will make Christ known in the way they themselves are coming to know him.

This brings us again to our calling here in Shirley. We are a community learning to follow Jesus together, learning to grow in him, learning to go for him. We are people who long to know Christ — and

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to make him known. But prior to all of that – first remember that Jesus chose you. Never forget, he chose you to follow him before you chose to follow him.

I have said many times before, the very people that Jesus picked for his initial 12 were certainly far from models of perfection. Jesus does not demand perfection - thank goodness, I for one wouldn't be standing here - but he simply wants people who are prepared to give it a try, get stuck in, have a go.

### **Going**

We are not expected to go in the same way those first apostles went. But we **are** expected to go — to do something, to step out, to witness. Going may not mean travelling anywhere. It may simply mean being a faithful, hopeful, Christ-shaped presence in the places we already find ourselves — our families, our friendships, our workplaces, our social circles. Going means carrying Christ with us into the ordinary.

So today, as we hear Jesus gather, nurture, and send his disciples, we remember that this is our rhythm too. We come to know Christ more deeply; we grow in his life and love; and then we go — in small ways and large — to make him known. And as we go, we trust that the same Spirit who sent those first disciples is sending us still, and that the harvest, even here in Shirley, is plentiful.

And perhaps we remember where we began: faith is not a spectator sport. Christ calls us off the sidelines and onto the pitch — to play our part, to share his compassion, and to join his mission in the world he loves. Amen.

***Rev'd Richard Haynes 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity***