THE SUNDAY FOCUS

Weekly Worship from Gladsmuir & Longniddry Parish Churches
Issue 170 18th June 2023
Online at www.longniddrychurch.org.uk

Today's Bible reading

Matthew 10:1-10 ("The Mission of the Twelve")

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food. Amen. *(NRSV)*

Today's hymns

Seek ye first the kingdom of God (CH:641)
When I needed a neighbour (CH:544)
Rock of ages, cleft for me (CH:554)
Now thank we all our God (CH:182)

I am sure we have all known the following situation. A couple are in a car, on the road, in the dark, searching for some place or other off the beaten track. Here is how the conversation goes:

"I know it's along here somewhere."

"Why don't we look at the map?"

"Mmm, I feel absolutely certain that this is the road we need to be on."

"But I have the map right here."

"Yes, yes, I definitely remember now. It's those three trees, look. I definitely recall that there was something to do with three trees."

"Recall from when?"

"From when I was five, the last time I came here: 'Look Daddy', I said, 'there's three trees.'"

"You know, it would be no trouble for me just to look up the map for you."

"Now then, let's see, there should be a sign for Inverness just around this next bend, and … yes … there it is. A sign for …"

"… Carlisle."

That kind of discussion is far from unusual and often involves someone being reluctant or incapable of admitting defeat. And in many ways that's not too surprising, is it? We want to trust our own unshakable memories, our own unswerving instincts when it comes to finding our way from A to B. Yet, if truth be told, our own abilities in life are so often less than we might imagine. And how we cringe when the person who finds those abilities lacking is none other than our significant other, sitting there in the passenger seat.

In this week's gospel reading, Jesus gives his disciples perhaps the closest thing they will ever get to a map *which they will badly need* for their ministry. Telling the twelve to go and proclaim the good news that "the kingdom of heaven has come near," Jesus provides a rough—not to mention sobering—chart of the landscape which they will venture into. He tells them of the hazards which the terrain will likely present. He tells them what towns and people they should avoid. He tells them how to navigate occasions of hospitality on the one hand and disdain on the other. And he gives them the authority to do the work he has called them to do: to chart a path of faith that will be marked by mission.

Early on in their ministry, the disciples could know little of what the road ahead would actually be like for them, or where it would lead on their long and unpredictable journey. At this point of "stepping out" into the world, what they need is a map to guide them; to show them the way; to take them from point "A" (the well-known and comfortable point) to Point "B" (the great unknown).

Here then is Jesus, instructing the twelve in very clear and specific terms, for a very particular task: Go out, avoid the Gentiles, steer clear of the Samaritans, visit the lost sheep of Israel, preach, heal, raise the dead, cast out demons, and in all of this, travel light – that's the gist of this ministry roadmap. And it is clearly a roadmap that involves a rather considerable step of faith for all concerned.

I wonder if the disciples went out thinking about Jesus' words with a fair bit of scepticism: avoid Gentiles, preach to lost sheep, heal, that's fair enough. But raise the dead, don't take any money, and not even an *extra shirt*. Goodness me, what kind of instructions are those?

But, as we so often find in this faith of ours, we are called out of the familiar and into a new way of living that is alien and quirky and dangerous. And it is at that point in our lives – when we are taking that reckless step of faith – that we most need that dependable map which will guide us well. Perhaps the disciples found this to be quite true for their own situation, going off as they were equipped with next to nothing, attempting the next to impossible.

Yes, when the going gets hardest of all in life, that's when we find our greatest need of maps, and that's when we need to be sufficiently humble as to accept their guidance. In the words of the old saying: "If you don't look at your map, you might never realise that you're lost."

At certain points in our lives, it is important just to stop, to unfold that mental map and come to terms with exactly what your position truly is. Hopefully you can gain a greater understanding of where you have come from, of where you are, and – in particular – of where it is that you are heading. Points of reference on life's landscape – vital things for you to look towards. But what *are* these points of reference? How do you know what to look for in seeking guidance?

For us in our lives, there are all sorts of points of reference which can help us to map out our position and set our direction: our past history, our personal experience, our family, our friends, our church, our faith, our God. All these we can turn to, not just for help or for guidance, but just quite simply for a sense of position: where we are in the grand scheme of things; where we are in the loud clamour of modern life; where we are in an emerging post-Covid world that is so incredibly hard to pin down for sure and certain. In such situations, something fixed and dependable can be a rock for us.

The artist Jan Richardson once made a very simple collaged map depicting, she says, her life in ministry. Showing a meandering road, some buildings, water, and a Cross, the simple map helped her to clarify in her own mind what she had travelled through, so letting her focus on in her own journey of faith. Here's what she has to say about that map artwork:

"As with most maps, I can chart the landscape only in retrospect; I recognize the roads because I have travelled them, often making them up as I went along. Making this collaged map, I had certain kinds of landmarks on my mind, but I fashioned it with the awareness that I could have charted the landscape any number of ways. I could have marked the locations where pivotal conversations occurred, where I witnessed healing, where I encountered birth or death. I could have charted the places of peril, of heartbreak, of unexpected wonders. … And it might tell of those sites where the convoluted terrain finally opened up and spilled me out into a plain where I knew more deeply who I was, what I was called to do, what Christ was giving me authority to do."

Never forget that maps do change over time. Our reading today is from Matthew chapter 10, but by Matthew chapter 28 the disciples were sent out again on a different journey, with a different map. No more avoiding Gentiles and Samaritans (as in our reading today). In the light of the Resurrection, the Good News was to go out far and wide:

Jesus drew near and said to them, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age. Amen.

Praying for others

Gracious God,

June takes us into the golden months we've been waiting for with hopes of high summer.

Thank you for days of sunshine, warm summer evenings, flower-filled gardens, leafy trees, singing birds and the sound of children playing, for gala days and garden parties.

We pray for all those whose high hopes in life have been dashed:

for the Windrush generation, that they may flourish in every way possible, and be treated with honour and respect;

for ministers, pastors, missionaries and teachers dedicated to serving others, that they may find rest and renewal in dark and disappointing days;

for pupils and students struggling with anxiety and fear of not doing well in exams, that they may find courage, and acceptance that all they need do is their own best;

for families across the globe who have lost everything through war or tyranny, that you will be with them, Lord, as they strive with quiet self-respect to maintain standards for their children and grandchildren, against all the odds.

Help us to live up to your high hopes for us, that we may see where help is needed, and that we may without hesitation rise to lend our hand.

Through the Love of Jesus Christ your Son, who shows us the way. Amen.

Weekly Updates ...

Christian Aid Week 2023: Thank you to everyone who supported this year's Christian Aid Week Envelope Appeal in Longniddry and the Plant Sales which took place there and also for the first time in Blindwelss. Together you helped raise over £2,650 for Christian Aid!

Prayer and contemplation: Tuesdays from 2-3pm in the Longniddry Church sanctuary. Peace, quiet and space in which to reflect in the presence of God.

New Age Kurling: Tuesdays from 2-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church. This is for anyone who might like to exercise their mind and body while making new friends. All ages and levels of physical ability most welcome.

Wednesday Club: Wednesdays from 2.30-4pm in Room 3, Longniddry Church. Come along and enjoy fun activities, entertainment, chat, tea/coffee. (Contact Janet 07766574123)

Sporting Memories Group: Thursdays from10.30am – 12 noon in Room 3, Longniddry Church. Come along, listen and share sporting memories with other older sports fans.

Printed and published by Gladsmuir Parish Church (Church of Scotland): SC005996; and Longniddry Parish Church (Church of Scotland): SC016556.