# Luke 10.1-11

6th July 2025
COTHA St Michael’s

##  Partnership in Mission

*Lord God – our prayer is that the written word will point us to Christ, the Living Word – so in his name we pray and for his voice we listen. Amen*.

Can I begin by saying *thank you* to Revd Debbie and Revd Peter for your kind welcome this morning. It’s always a joy to join you for worship here at St Michael’s. And, as I say that, I’m conscious that the COTHA Covenant came into being 30 years ago last month, signed as it was in June 1995. The Revd Brian Griffiths signing for St Michael’s, The Revd Bill Murphey for St John’s, and The Revd Keith Riglin for the Free Church. And we are looking forward to signing an updated Covenant next year. So Happy 30th Birthday to COTHA!

Now to the sermon!

Mission is a churchy word. It’s also a corporate ‘in’ word – with organisations crystallising their aims into a ‘Mission Statement’.

Last century I cut my teeth as a student minister whilst training at a ‘Mission’ chapel just a few miles out of Sevenoaks. Every other Sunday I would lead the afternoon service at this country chapel planted in the 1800’s as an act of mission outreach by the bigger church in town. Back in the 80’s when I was there it was full of country people, often tenant farmers. It was an afternoon service so most, and I experienced this because of their warm hospitality, had just had a wonderful Sunday Roast. Well, at our little Mission Chapel, the inevitable happened as eyelids slowly closed as I preached. Always made me smile at the door when the ones who had slept through most of the sermon said how much they had enjoyed it!

Today’s Lectionary passage from Luke describes the Mission of the 72. A time to put some of what they had learnt from Jesus into practice. A definite ‘sending out’ – maybe we could even view it in the Disciples’ Apprenticeship Programme as their ‘Work Experience’ week!

In Genesis 10 the Gentile nations of the world are poetically listed as 72 so just maybe this was Luke’s way of saying this Mission by the 72 disciples represents an inclusive sharing of the gospel to everyone, everywhere.

Go – says Jesus to these 72, go in pairs, go to live and be alongside people, go as commissioned servants of mine and share the gospel message with others.

Now surely one of the significant aspects of today’s reading is the idea that they were to take nothing with them as they went into villages and townships. It was, in a way, the well accepted tradition of the poor rabbis. The one who just came as themself – no bribes to give out, no goodies to entice people in, no grand claims – just yourself in all your frailty and vulnerability - yet also – and perhaps most importantly – with all your integrity.

I love that thought and even find it wonderfully liberating.

You could sometimes be forgiven as you read the bible that mission always seems to be overly dramatic and you might even come to the conclusion it’s just not for you – yet here the essence of the mission of the 72 seems to be simply this: go and be yourself.

In a way that’s all Jesus is asking them, and us, to do. But, of course, it’s a very great deal.

Now we’d want to say in a sermon on this passage that there were hospitality customs in those far off days that might seem a little odd to us today. Yet these customs made this sort of mission, the mission of just turning up, possible.

Middle Eastern houses often had an open forecourt with an open table – a place always set aside to entertain the traveller. There was the expectation that you could just turn up at mealtimes, walk in and be welcomed.

So, the strategy was simple – go and be a guest at someone else’s table – eat bread together and in doing so become companions – and in the table talk at these meals share your ideals about life and faith. If your host expresses an interest stay a little longer – if not leave.

This mission of the 72 is about living openly and with integrity in a community and using that community’s customs to share your faith in a positive and constructive way.

Who we are – individually and collectively matters when it comes to mission.

I grew up in a church with a Bible Class leader who just seemed to love us all into the Kingdom of God. Because of this positive ‘role modelling’ I believe many of us we caught a glimpse of the God who so inspired him.

Who we are matters.

Both our churches owe their origins to wonderful Christian people who wanted the newly established Amersham on the Hill to have churches that served the community in a spirit of Christ like kindness. Our forebears practiced mission.

So, Alfred Ellis, an Edwardian lawyer and solicitor to the Baptist Union, fulfilled that vision once he’d moved to Amersham on the Hill. He gathered together some other ‘friends of Jesus’ (that’s what he called them!) whose home was also here, and together in 1907 they planted Amersham Free Church.

St Michael’s, for so long a worshipping community gathered behind us in what is now your hall, rejoiced in the opening of this building, standing at the very centre of our community, in 1966. And at that opening the Bishop of Oxford said these words, a sort of invitation to mission: *Now the building stands here ready to be used, and I know that it will be used. We want our churches inside and outside to lift up the hearts and minds of our people to God.*

And in all of this we are in some mysterious and privileged way ‘partnering’ God in the mission that is already his. We haven’t by ourselves invented compassion and service – it’s the very nature of God and he calls us, summons us, invites and commissions us to jump in and share that mission with him.

There are times, of course, for the prophet to come to town – Jesus did that – and we give thanks for modern day orators who lead in an upfront way like Martin Luther King or Desmond Tutu.

But then there is the sort of mission exemplified by Mother Theresa’s Sisters of Charity of simply going out into the streets and nursing the sick, the mission of Duncan Dyason of getting Street Children in South America back into School, the mission of Work Aid sending out tools so people can live their lives with a productive dignity, and the mission of Open The Book of giving an acted out bible story every week at a school assembly here in Amersham.

For you at St Michael’s I perceive that means, celebrating a cherished liturgy here on Sundays and Tuesdays, of welcoming the community at Pop in and Paint, or at a Crafty Cuppa, or reaching out to the community with such imagination through Messy Church.

For us at AFC it means valuing our ministry of Word and Sacrament, of being a place of hospitality through LunchBreak and Tea at Three and of greeting families at Fun at One.

You don’t need gimmicks and fireworks when it comes to mission – but you do need God, integrity and compassion.

Today we’ve been recalling this sending out of the 72. A call to live out our faith, with God’s help and always in a spirit of love, by being ourselves in community.

May that sense that we are joining God in this ‘Partnership in Mission’ inspire us today in the name of our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen
 *Ian Green Amersham 6th July 2025*