Sunday 3rd July,

Luke 10: 1-12 and 17-24

Jesus wanted his followers to understand the concept of cost of discipleship. He tells his followers what to do, what to pray and what to rejoice in.

The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few. So do we have to save the world? No; that is the work of the Holy Spirit. In Australia where the recent census informs that only 40 percent of people are religious let alone Christian, I don’t think hard-sell is going to cut it. A better way to go may be to create a way of life-that is so and alluring and meaningful that others want a piece of the action. So what are we actually called to do?

This question is addressed in a new book called *Graced Crossroads.* This is what the author Ted Dunn says about contemporary religious life. It actually echoes last Sunday’s discussion.

What do you plan for your life and hope for the future of your community? “Undoubtedly you are busy, if not overwhelmed planning how best to look after yourselves, how to find sustainable ways to structure your governance, manage your finances, obtain the highest and best use of your buildings. But what about the highest and best use of your member’s time and energy? What about caring for the soul of your community? Like it or not, communities are compelled to change during this transitional time, but there is a deeper invitation, “the possibility of new life”.

Now biblical commentators on this gospel told me we should pray earnestly for more workers because there is there is a time factor associated with the work. Unharvested crops in the field rot.

So how does the gospel intersect with a reading of contemporary culture? Dunn gives fresh insight into the our world with what he identifies as *A great Turning* he lists the following issues. A mixture of manmade and natural circumstances have brought our planet to a tipping point. Global warming, rising sea levels, waves of migration have created an existential threat to our planet. Some scientists talk of the emergence of a new consciousness and new ways of living. Determination and collaboration are key to the emergence of such new consciousness.

Next, there is a hunger for spirituality and a decline in all mainline religions especially Catholicism. Only Evangelicals and Protestants are increasing and there is the emergence of a group called Nones. They have created their own mish-mash of beliefs.

Religions face the same issues; advancing age and financial constraints. But all is not lost! Dunn believes that the right kinds of decisions need to be made. Unfortunately, churches take the path of least resistance and so may be driven more by fear than courage. This is where I found strong links with the HeartEdge approach rather than the numbing narrative of aging and diminishment, transformation from the inside is compelled by an urgent need for change. The deep invitation is to the beckoning love of God.

Dunn gives some directives about change. A kind of list. The bend in the road is not an end in the road unless you fail to make the turn. Wise decisions come with a focus on mission and the future. What got you to today will not get you to tomorrow. Adaption is absolutely necessary but how you adapt is key.

He identifies misguided efforts. Making new versions of the past. Try harder not differently. Playing it safe rather than innovating. Engage incrementally rather than bringing deep change. Avoiding something bad, rather than creating something new. Downloading the same information rather than creating a new operating system. Focusing on external change rather than inner work.

Back to the gospel. Jesus told his followers the work is hard; so team-work is best. As I said last week, no one person can be all things. This is why we need each other. We can contribute our own particular strengths and look to others to help with our areas of weakness.

Jesus told his followers to pray, and Dunn talks of the grace-filled crossroads. “This can be a painful place if there are things to be let-go, but it can be a place of liberation. We may have questions for which we can’t find answers. But with denial gone, we can begin to listen and search for the right answers. We can begin to hear the still small voice”. Jesus tells his followers to expect pushback. We also experience this. It may be external or in our own community. But grace flourishes everywhere and we never more aware of it than at the crossroads. It comes bidden and unbidden. “When we face the pain of the crossroads we are hollowed out. We are emptied of all hubris and stripped of our defences. It is there in the quietness of our soul’s searching that we come face to face with those parts of ourselves we had rejected hidden from ourselves and those we love. In this place of grace, God continually puts before us choices of life and death. God lures us towards life. But the choice is ours”.

Dunn’s observations follow the each of the steps set down in the gospel. The Kingdom of God has come near.

Acknowledgement and embrace is required of everyone of us. God places in our hearts the desire to pray. The task of the disciple is to follow. The everyday life of a disciple is living with trust in God. We are to maintain our focus*.*

I read six commentators on this gospel, and they were of one view. Our gifts are not a cause for boasting. They should be used for the body of Christ.

Behold I have given you authority to tread on serpents and over the enemy. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this. You might marvel at God working in and through you but this is his own glory. So you should rejoice that your name is written in heaven and guard against being puffed up.

I was given sound advice on my ordination retreat. When things are going well in your ministry success is not because of you. When things are going badly its not because of you. The gospel message is; Rejoice in what God has done for you.

So how do we grasp for the transformation of the Kingdom? Look to shift your consciousness and create a new narrative. Reclaim your inner voice. Seek reconciliation and the womb of our becoming. Experiment and learn, act on new ways of being. Use transformative visioning, gather wisdom and weave a dream.

It is a multilayered multi-dimensional and integrative state and we need to make this journey with the turn at the graced cross-road. I’ll meet you there!

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