**SUNDAY JUNE 14th 2020**

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**THE HARVEST IS READY**

**“*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest,***

***therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field”. Matthew 9: 37-38.***

**Welcome to our Service today. We have Good News; our church will open again from Monday for private prayer though for the moment our corporate worship needs to remain virtual. Let’s rejoice now though that technology means we can still join in prayer and worship together and listen to God’s Word and seek to apply it to our own situation.**

**HYMN:** Our first hymn looks to God to be our vision, our wisdom and the first in our heart.: Be thou My vision. https://youtu.be/ZyFu0rl58qQ

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art -
Thou my best thought, by day or by night;
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord.
Thou my great Father; I Thy true son,
Thou in me dwelling and I one with thee.

Be Thou my battleship, my sword for the fight,

Be Thou my armour, and Thou my delight.

Thy my soul’s shelter, and Thou my high tower,

Raise Thou me heavenward, O power of my power.

High King of heaven, when victory’s won,
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

**A time now to say sorry to God:**

 Jesus says, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.’

 *A short time of silence*

**All:** **Holy God, have mercy upon us, forgive us where we have gone wrong and sinned and help us to walk from now on in your way. Amen.**

 May the God of love and power bring you back to Himself, forgive you through the death of His Son Jesus, free you from your sins, and restore you to newness of life by His Spirit

**PRAYER OF THE WEEK:**

**God of truth, help us to keep your law of love and to walk in ways of wisdom,**

**that we may find true life in Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.**

**READING: Matthew 9: v 35-38.**

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

**SERMON:**

Let us pray: Loving Heavenly Father, as we thank you for the gift of Your Word, we pray for the ability to understand and the willingness to put it into practice. For Your Name's sake. Amen.

At the end of the film Schindler's List, Oscar Schindler is given an award by a group of hundreds of Jews, all of whom have been rescued from the Germans by him during the second world war. As he is given the award, Schindler breaks down in tears and sobs "I could have done more. I could have sold my watch and saved another person. I could have sold my car, and saved another Jew. I could have saved more".

That is how many Christians feel today as they look at the world - it is so big, there is so much to do. How can we possibly fulfil Jesus' command to "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations?" The task seems so daunting.

Let us then turn to the words of Jesus, and see what His commands are on the subject. Using the picture of harvest in Matthew 9 to represent a needy world, Jesus says to his followers "The harvest is plentiful, the workers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers into His harvest field.

Let us examine this command in more detail.

1. The harvest is plentiful - v 37. In other words, there is plenty for the Christian to do in this world -many people to reach. The scope is vast - Jesus' last words in Matthew's Gospel were a command to go into all the world and make disciples. There is much work to be done.
2. The harvest is precious - v 36.
When He saw the crowds, Jesus had compassion on them. In John 6, we are told that Jesus had compassion on the crowd, 5,000 of them, and there Jesus ministered to their physical needs - he healed the sick(Matthew 14 v 14) and He fed them with food, and with more than enough. The reason the harvest is so important to Christians is because Jesus loves the world so much.
3. The harvest is perplexed - ie the people are harrassed and helpless - v 36.
Keeping with the agricultural image, Jesus sees the people as sheep, harrassed and helpless in this world. Harrassed by life's pressures, financial worries, family concerns. Harrassed especially at this time, as we all seem to be floundering under the coronavirus attack. And yet no one need doubt Jesus' concern to be the Answer for us, or ever doubt how much our ingratitude or disobedience grieves His heart of love.
4. The harvest, or rather the people are perishing.
In the parallel passage in John 4, Jesus impresses upon His followers the need to see the urgency of getting in the harvest. He says there "You think that there are four months still to harvest. NO - it is ready NOW - Now is the time to do the work - now is the time to get the harvest in." Now is the time, according to this imagery, for the workers to reach out into the world.
5. The harvest is top priority - v 38

            A preacher once said long ago "The situation is desperate, but the saints are not." President Kennedy said, three weeks before he was assassinated, "Almost all presidents leave office feeling that their work is unfinished. I have a lot to do, but so little time to do it. " We come back to the point made at the beginning - the world is vast - its needs are vast - what can I possibly do? Jesus gives us an answer in v 38.

a) pray. Ask the Lord of the harvest, says our Master. Ask, pray, pray for people in our community, pray for one particular world mission (you can't pray for them all!), pray for one needy area of this country that you know. And let us respond to the initiative of the project Thy Kingdom Come, where our church leaders encouraged us to pray for five people to come to know Jesus for themselves. That is manageable, that is realistic.

b) Tell our story

"To send out workers into the harvest field." Of course that means praying for missionaries, for people like Keith and Mary who work for FOMO in Malawi. But we can contribute by telling our own story, mentioning in one of the many conversations that we have with friends, neighbours, relatives, how we came to faith, or what our Christian faith means to us now.

Let me end with an illustration which helpfully shows both the magnitude of the task, the enormity of the world's needs, and the possibility that we can play our own part in this heavenly harvest. A man was once walking along a beach, treading gingerly in order to avoid the thousands and thousands of starfish that had been stranded on the sand by the receding tide. A few hundred yards away, he saw a boy walking towards him, picking up starfish and throwing them back into the sea. As they approached each other (this was before the days of social distancing!), the man asked the boy: "Why are you doing that? What difference can you possibly make to the thousands and thousands of starfish on this beach.?" The boy said nothing, looked at the man, then bent down , picked up a starfish, and threw it far into the sea. "It made a difference to that one ", the boy said.

There is a role for each of us to play, in this wonderful heavenly harvest.

**Prayer:-** Lord Jesus, we thank you for your command to ask the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers. We pray that we may be faithful in prayer, and also alive to the possibilities of serving you in our various situations. For the extension of Your Kingdom, and for the Glory of Your Name. Amen.

**HYMN** Our next song praises Jesus our Lord, our Saviour, our comfort, our shelter: My Jesus My Saviour https://youtu.be/hGmZcTCXjmM

My Jesus, my Saviour
Lord there is none like you
All of my days, I want to praise
The wonders of your mighty love
My comfort, my shelter
Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am
Never cease to worship You

Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing
Power and majesty, praise to the King
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of Your name
I sing for joy at the work of your hands
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have
In YOU

My Jesus, my Saviour
Lord there is none like You
All of my days, I want to praise
The wonders of your mighty love
My Comfort
My Shelter
Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am
Never…

**PRAYERS:**

Lord we begin our prayers today by giving thanks for all the good in our community during this lockdown period. We give thanks for the many acts of kindness, consideration and support that have been made within our community, and for the love and care shown in so many ways by our families and friendship groups. We remember especially all who continue to work in health care under considerable and sustained pressure, all who are working to maintain our food supplies and essential services, and all who are supporting the most vulnerable in our community.

Help us to remember that we are all also your family in Christ Jesus and that we are needed to work in your name within our local area. Lord help us to reflect your will in everything we do in our daily lives, taking time to listen, pray and work in your name, so that those who come across us can see your word in practice, and be inspired to seek out St Michael’s Church and discover why we act as we do.

As we start to consider how to reopen our church in the future, help us to act as your family – to reflect, listen to each other, and incorporate all the good that has come out of this pandemic into our planning, and to ensure that we are guided by you and your Word in every decision that we make.

Lord hear us.Lord graciously hear us

At this time of further changes as we slowly emerge from lockdown, we give thanks especially that those in single households will be able to have some contact with loved ones. We pray for all who have been struggling with feelings of isolation, despair, boredom and anxiety, and for all whose mental health has deteriorated during this extremely challenging time.

We pray also for teachers, parents and children as plans are made for education in circumstances which are complicated, challenging and unprecedented; thinking especially of our own primary schools at St Michael’s and Little Hoole. As feelings and opinions run high, we pray that decisions are guided with calmness and consideration and that a positive way forward can be found.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us

In this week of turmoil around the world in response to the death of George Floyd, we pray for his family and friends who have had to grieve in the full glare of publicity, but have conducted themselves with such dignity. For many people, this terrible act of murder has unleashed long held emotions and deep seated anger, while others have expressed their feelings about injustice for the first time. We acknowledge the need many have to be heard, recalling the words of Martin Luther King that “the ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and the cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people”. We pray that peaceful, dignified and sincere protest will gain ground over the violent outbursts, that those with authority to set things right will listen, and that George Floyd’s family will continue to gain support for their wish that his death will change the world for good.

Lord hear u. Lord graciously hear us

Lord we continue to pray for all those caught up personally in the Covid 19 crisis. We remember especially all who have died, their families and friends, and all who remain seriously ill in hospital. We pray also for all who are struggling with other health needs which cannot currently be addressed, and for all with mounting mental illness. We remember those who fear redundancy, or who are starting to struggle financially with the loss of income and work, and those who feel the way ahead for them is bleak. Strengthen them Lord we pray, and help us to find ways of making their lives just a little bit easier.

In our own community we pray for Nancy Mawdsley, Michael Harrison, Althea Slater and Beryl Blakeley, and any others known to us personally who need our prayers at this time.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.

Finally Lord we give thanks especially today for the lives of Pearl Read, Bernice Hesketh, Austin Spencer, Dorothy Watkinson, Dorothy Linton and any others known to us who have died recently. We pray for their friends and families;

May they feel your comfort Lord at this most difficult time, and find your peace. As we give thanks for Pearl who has been part of this congregation for so many years, we thank you for her deep faith in you and her courage and positivity, thanking you that she is at last at rest with you her Lord and Saviour.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We join now in the prayer Jesus taught His followers to pray:

**Our Father who art in heaven**

**Hallowed be thy name**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done**

**On earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses**

**As we forgive those who trespass against us**

**And lead us not into temptation**

**But deliver us from evil**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen**

**NOTICES**

**It is great news indeed that we can once again open St Michael’s church from Monday 15th June. At this point in time the church will open for private prayer (and funerals) only from 9.30 – 4.30 every day. Prayer materials will be inside the church for those who would like to use them. Social distancing must take place at all times.**

**And let us continue to pray for one another and for all those having to take decisions about how we can gradually come out of Lockdown safely**

**HYMN;** Our final hymn focuses on the great task Jesus has given to each one of us personally to take the Good News to all people.:- ***I the Lord of sea and sky*** ***https://youtu.be/mgLwH5RdtPk***I,

I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them,
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I, Lord?*

I, the Lord of wind and flame
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them,
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide,
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them,
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I, Lord?*

**BLESSING**

May the Love of the Risen Lord Jesus draw you to Himself

May the Power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you to serve Him

And may the Joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts

And so may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and all those whom you love, now and for ever more. Amen

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