

## Bennochy church 17th June 2018

On the wall is a sheet of paper. It is white with a black dot on it. Nothing else. When people are asked, 'what do you see?', most will answer, 'I see a black dot', ignoring all the white space round about it. Why do I share that? Most people are uncomfortable with what used to be described as "blue sky thinking". Let's think 'out of the box' and write our new shiny ideas on a blank piece of paper. If we are honest with ourselves, we actually prefer the black dot. Something to focus on. A place to begin. A hook, to hang our thoughts on.

However, the danger with focusing on the black dot is this, you end up looking only at details, that which is right in front of you. People become blinkered and totally ignore the big picture. All that blank space to be filled in, where we can be adventurous and creative. In the church we are more comfortable with details. Those things that we have some control over. That are in some way tangible, like buildings and finance, rather than with new possibilities where we have no idea where the journey will end. Faith is about that pilgrim journey into the unknown.

There are those who say, that the blueprint for the church is found in scripture. In a very real sense that is true, but it can lead us into uncomfortable places, where, if we are honest with ourselves, we actually don't want to go, but in so doing, we move our eyes from the black dot, to the wide open spaces of the unknown.

We find the newly chosen disciples sent out on their first mission. These guys are not theology graduates, but men taking their first steps, as part of a new exciting, emerging church. Let's look and see what they were asked to do.

To begin with, they are called by Jesus and given authority. That is important. We have all been called by God. What were they asked to do? Note this, drive out evil spirits and heal every disease and sickness! That is some agenda! That takes our eyes away from the black dot and what we as a church have been focusing on, and make us think about church in a very different way? The question we should be asking is this, 'what do these words mean, for the church today?'

No matter how we might wish to interpret these verses, and they are open to interpretation, it sends a very strong message about the power of God, and certainly a power well beyond these 12 men. Think about it. If this is what was about to happen, it would certainly get people's attention and asking, 'what is going on here'? What this all about? Who are these guys? Where does this power come from? I am also wondering, how the disciples felt about what they were being asked to do? I would love to know the bits that are not recorded in the bible. 'What is he asking us to do?' 'You have got to be kidding?' 'No way!'

The key word here is authority. That is the message that Matthew is keen to put over. They are not going to do this by themselves. That is not possible. I think there is something hugely important in that message for us as a church today, to learn from.

The early gospel stories are about going to the people of Israel. It is only later on that you get stories like the encounter between Peter the Jew and Cornelius the Gentile, where Peter has to be taught that God's message is for all. Not just the people of Israel. At this moment in time, the disciples are told to avoid Gentile territory and Samaritan towns. That is where they are going.

If authority is important, so is the context. The context in which they are being asked to go out, is the fact that the Kingdom of God is near. Because of that, go and preach the Good news. Because of that, heal the sick. Because of that, bring the dead back to life. Because of that, drive out demons. Let's rewind a bit. Did he say, raise the dead? Forget the black dot, now we are onto real blue sky thinking! We are way into the white space!

How do you feel about this blueprint for the church? Our context is exactly the same. The Kingdom of God is always near. Jesus is giving us some pretty powerful black dots to focus on, but they are way out of our comfort zone! I can't help but

thinking the impact these guys must have made. And they are to receive nothing in return.

When we move into the realm of the miraculous, we can struggle. Let's be honest, are we asking ourselves, was anyone actually raised to life by any of these men, and if they were, why was it not recorded? If more readily accepted in the times of Jesus, our modern thinking, its logic and rational, scientific base, makes us wonder, how do we interpret such words? There is no easy answer to that question, but it does raise another question, if sent by God, what are we sent to do? What is the Good News?

The gospel is about new life. John 10:10. Not for tomorrow, but for today. Is that new life not 'resurrection'? We live in a world where people are captive to addictions, poverty and loneliness. To name just a few. We live in a world surrounded by the demons of depression and poor mental health, with all their many consequences. These seem to be political debate every day about the best way to fund our NHS. Health and wellbeing are rightly high on the nations agenda. That is our context and the backcloth; that has not changed, it is the promise that the Kingdom of God is close.

Maybe our journey is more like those early pioneers of faith than we would have first thought. Together, we journey into the unknown. Into those wide open white spaces. Places we have

never been before. Sign post we don't recognise. Pilgrim people.

On the Way. Amen.