

The “In Crowd” (Matthew 9:35 – 10:16)

It's late, you're sitting around together sipping drinks and chatting. Enjoying the feeling of security and importance that being part of the group gives you. And you just love listening to the master speak. Oh you could listen to his voice for ever, with so many interesting things to say, such a different take on life. Even now he's outlining his ideas on the kingdom, speaking so movingly about the lost people in Israel, how he feels such compassion for them.

You nod and agree, and the others do too. Yes, it's terrible isn't it. They're like sheep without a shepherd. Like a vast harvest without enough people to gather it in. There he is again, using these brilliant and different ways of describing things. You could hang on his every word. Yes it is like a harvest. Yes, of course you'll pray as he asks you to, for God to send more people to gather in his people.

And so you pray – because he's asked you to. Because everyone else is so earnestly bending their heads too.

'Lord of the harvest. We pray that you will send out workers into your harvest field.' As the prayers mumble on you feel yourself drifting off into another world. There you are in the thick of the action, doing amazing things for God. And all around you are a circle of admirers impressed by your commitment and dedication to the task.

You're brought back to reality with a jolt as you realise the master is calling you. 'Thaddeus, Thaddeus! How about it then ? you'll pair up with James, okay ? Now remember what I said, no extra luggage.'

And suddenly you don't feel cosy and secure any more. Actually, if you were being totally honest with yourself you'd admit to being a bit afraid. Because Jesus wants **you** to do the harvesting. No longer sitting listening to talk about Israel, but instead transforming Israel. You'll be healing them and raising them and cleansing them and drawing them in with stories of the Kingdom. Wow

Being in the 'in crowd'

The strongest feeling I've ever had of being in the in crowd came sitting in a mini bus on the way to the Peak District, absolutely crammed in and loaded down with rucksacs, long before rules about forward facing seats and seatbelts. The Duke of Edinburgh's award was a really formative and special time for me. There was something so good about laughing together and all heading for the same goal. I was filled with a sense of doing something

special that I can't quite put into words. A feeling that it doesn't get any better than this !

We're in the 'in crowd' here at Wade Street Church. And I mean that in a positive sense rather than some kind of clique. We have a sense of security and togetherness because we're following and listening to the same master – Jesus Christ. We gather to hear what he has to say, and have opportunity to nod and agree and discuss it among ourselves. Our master gives us a sense of identity and a sense of cohesion. Ian was just talking the other week about how in church life we rub along with people we wouldn't normally come into contact with.

The same was true of the disciples. If ever there was a diverse group of people united by a common leader, this was it. A tax collector and a zealot in the same room ? Unheard of.

2008 is going to be the 'year of discipleship' in this church as we focus on all kinds of aspects of what it means to be Christ's followers.

This morning I believe that God wants to challenge us as he did those first disciples, to move from being the 'in crowd' to being the 'out crowd'. From listening to talk of the harvest, to actually doing the harvesting. From sitting in security in here to going out and taking some risks in communicating the gospel. From praying for more workers, to actually being the workers. And if that seems a bit scary, here is a quite mind-blowing thing to hold onto – Jesus needs us. He needs us.

Jesus needed those first disciples, Peter and James and Thaddeus and the others, so that he could mobilise his movement, communicate his message. One man (even the son of God it seems) couldn't do it all. And the next generation – the Pauls, the Barnabases – were needed to continue the work further afield. And so on and so on, until we arrive in a small city in Western Europe in the first few years of the twenty-first century.

And here and now Christ cannot go it alone. He needs his disciples now to turn from being the 'in crowd' to being 'out there'. He needs disciples that will communicate his message of the kingdom, to live in such a way that people are drawn to hear more of this Jesus who we follow. We are his voice, and his hands and his feet and his mind in the places where we live and work and socialise.

And as we turn our focus to 'out there' it costs us. It costs us our security, our cosiness, maybe our lifestyle, our standard of living, our time and energy as it cost the first disciples who gathered around the master.

I learned this week that Rob Frost, national evangelist for the Methodist Church and founder of Share Jesus International died last Sunday. Known for his passionate preaching and commitment to social action, he epitomised a disciple of Christ who looked outwards all the time, who never tired of playing his part in God's mission and who did not count the cost.

I believe (along with a good many others if you read the tributes to him on various websites and blogs) that God will have greeted him saying 'well done, good and faithful servant.'

But how long will the details of Rob Frost's life be remembered? 50 years? 100 years even.

Hardly anything is known about those first disciples, Jesus' 'in crowd', bar their names, and there isn't even 100% agreement on those between the gospel writers. Instead it's their corporate actions that are remembered.

Rob Frost's actions and the corporate actions of Share Jesus international, done in the name of the gospel he so passionately believed in, will be remembered long after his name is forgotten, because he turned his attention to lost people, the out crowd, to those who didn't know what it was to come into the security of the masters presence, but who do now.

Those first disciples were a ragged bunch of men who often didn't have a clue what was going on. They realised of course that Jesus was someone very special and different, but it wasn't until after the resurrection that they really 'got it'. And yet despite their ignorance, their rough edges, Jesus entrusted them with the task of communicating his kingdom message.

You see being a communicator of the gospel doesn't mean having to know or understand everything before you can get involved. It's not like some posh golf club where you have to play with a certain handicap before you can be nominated. It's not like a tennis club that demands perfect whites before you're allowed to set foot on the court. Jesus calls each one of us who are his followers regardless of age, or experience or maturity to get involved in spreading his message of gospel, good news. He calls all of us, whether newly signed up, or having been on board for many years, to leave the comfort and security of the in crowd and to speak his name 'out there.'

I don't normally do requests, but there have been a number of requests recently for the mister men to make a re-appearance in my preaching, and it just so happens that they fit well this morning. So I leave you with this image as my final thought. It's Christmas. All the Mr Men are celebrating together at Mr Uppity's house. It begins to snow and they rush outside to play. All that is,

except Mr Tickle who continues to sit in his comfortable arm chair. He simply opens the window and stretches out his incredibly long arms until he can reach the snow. And in that manner he conducts a snowball fight with the other mister men whilst still sitting in his chair. Meanwhile Mr Small dives into the snow so that only his eyes are showing and Mr Bounce becomes a human snowball, gathering snow as he rolls.

The task the master calls us to has little to do with comfortable armchairs, and much more to do with getting out there and rolling around in the snow!

Sunday 18th November 2007. House Group Notes.

'The "In Crowd"' Matthew 9:35 – 10:16.

Jesus was moved by the sight of so many 'lost' people as he made a tour of his local area. He asked his disciples to pray for more workers, and then he made them the answer to the prayers by commissioning them to go out and preach, heal, cleanse, raise the dead, and drive out demons.

Being a disciple of Christ is not a cosy occupation. As we gather in his name, he calls us to go out and reach lost people with his message. That means exchanging security for risk, maybe giving up things that we hold dear, perhaps altering our standard of living.

Jesus disciples didn't understand much of what he taught them (they would understand much more fully after the resurrection) but they still had an essential ministry. Whatever our age, experience or maturity as Christ's disciples we still have a ministry.

For Discussion.

- What things in your Christian life make you feel secure ? Why ?
- The disciples became the answer to their prayer. Have there been any occasions when that has happened to you ?

- Read Ch 10 v 9-10 again. How would you apply those verses to your life in today's context ?
- What does it mean to be 'as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves' ?
- Wade Street Church seeks to be 'A church at the heart of the city, with Christ at the heart of the church'. Are there new ways in which we could communicate the gospel to the people of Lichfield ?