



Opening Prayer for Ordinary Time

God of adventure and growth,
open our hearts, ready our minds
and fire our imaginations,
so that as we gather together before you,
and ponder the life-giving stories of Jesus,
we might discover more of your goodness,
and be swept up by the Holy Spirit
as she nurtures, disturbs and inspires us
on our journey into fullness of life. **Amen**

'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

Have you ever reached the end of your resources, and had to totally rely upon others? If so, how did this make you feel, and why?

Prayers of Thanks and Praise

You are invited to take some quiet time to bring your thanksgivings, and then to use the following prayer to draw things together:

God of all goodness and blessing,
**receive our thanks and praises
in the name of Jesus Christ,
and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen**

Psalm of the Week – Psalm 30 (StF 808)

I will exalt you, O Lord, because you have raised me up
and have not let my foes triumph over me.
O Lord my God, I cried out to you
and you have healed me.
You brought me up, O Lord, from the dead;
**you restored me to life
from among those that go down to the pit.**
Sing to the Lord, you servants of his;
give thanks to his holy name.
For his wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye,
his favour for a lifetime.
**Heaviness may endure for a night,
but joy comes in the morning.**
In my prosperity I said, 'I shall never be moved.'
**You, Lord, of your goodness,
have made my hill so strong.'**
Then you hid your face from me, and I was very dismayed.
To you, O Lord, I cried;
to the Lord I made my supplication:
'What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit?
Will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?
'Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me;
O Lord, be my helper.'
You have turned my mourning into dancing;
**you have put off my sackcloth
and girded me with gladness;**
Therefore, my heart sings to you without ceasing;
O Lord my God, I will give you thanks for ever.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.
Amen

Prayers of Renewal

God of renewal and transformation, hope and change,
we come before you knowing there is much in our lives,
and in the life of the world you create and sustain,
in need of your redemption and renewal,
which we bring to you now in prayer:

Silence is kept for a few moments...

God of all goodness and blessings,
thank you that you forgive us, restore us,
and equip us to be your disciples.

Amen

Readings Isaiah 66:10 – 14
 Luke 10:1 – 11

Sermon

It is rather hard to believe that the third anniversary of my ordination has just passed, because it feels like time has flown by! This marked a significant step along my journey of faith, and it was wonderful to be able to share that special milestone with many from the churches I serve. Looking toward to the future, I anticipate the next significant journey I'm likely to undertake will be a physical one. In a couple of years' time, I will be entitled to a sabbatical, and the plan is to go on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. I hope to begin this eight-hundred kilometre walk in the French mountains before taking roads trodden by thousands before me, as I gradually make my way to the shrine of St James. The inspiration for this came via watching a film a few years ago when I lived in Milton Keynes and the minister at the church I then attended decided to show a series of films about death and grief. Two out of the three were miserable, but third movie

was actually rather good. It was called *The Way*, and starred Martin Sheen as an eye doctor, Tom Avery, who flies out to France in order to retrieve the body of his estranged son, Daniel, who was killed on the first day of his pilgrimage to Santiago.

Tom decides, after learning a bit about what is involved, to have the body of Daniel cremated and to take up the challenge of walking the pilgrim trail in his son's place – scattering the ashes on the way. On the road, he meets a Dutch man, Joost, who is trying to lose weight, but likes his food rather too much, a Canadian woman named Sarah fleeing an abusive husband and Jack, an eccentric Irish travel writer and wannabe James Joyce. Despite Tom's initial reluctance to have company, the four walk much of the pilgrimage together, relying on the hospitality of strangers for welcome, meals and accommodation as they go along, a bit like in the recent BBC pilgrimage series which has taken in a number of pilgrim journeys in the UK and Europe, not least the one I mean to undertake myself.

Our Gospel passage for today is also about journeying, though of a very different sort. Jesus had been wandering round Galilee and the surrounding Gentile regions, teaching and healing as he went along and attracting more than his fair share of trouble. He had effectively been ordered to leave one place, after casting out a demonic legion tormenting a man into a swine herd that had subsequently drowned. He fed five-thousand folk in one fell swoop, and was proclaimed as Israel's Messiah by Peter. Yet, centuries old religious conflict meant being turned away from Samaritan villages when he'd sought a bed for the night. Now, Jesus decided to send seventy new disciples on a mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God to the surrounding Jewish villages before he would finally leave Galilee behind, and face up to what he knew lay ahead of him in Jerusalem.

Chapter Ten of Luke's Gospel begins, therefore, in a similar manner to Chapter Nine. Jesus had first sent out the Twelve, to proclaim the

Kingdom of God, to heal the sick, and cast out demons in his name. They too had gone to towns and villages in central Galilee, with very specific instructions about what they could, and could not, bring with them – no money, food, water, bags, or even a pair of sandals! The custom at the time was that, if somebody was out on a journey, and they had arrived in a village or town when night was drawing in, then accommodation, food and hospitality would be provided. Hence, the disciples were to be totally reliant upon the welcome, and kindness, of others for their survival, as they moved about from place to place, spreading Jesus's message. I guess it was a very different world to modern Britain, where I imagine Jesus would have needed to make sure they had enough cash for the odd night in a Travelodge and a meal at Wetherspoons, at the least – other hotels and pubs exist!

However, while both teams of disciples, the twelve and the seventy-two, had similar aims and instructions, the situation was different for the seventy-two sent out the second time round as Jesus was ready to move on, and knew he wouldn't be coming back to Galilee. So, it was the last chance for those folks to embrace God's Kingdom, and Jesus's way of peace. Now, we actually know very little about those selected by Jesus for this hugely important task – which is probably not surprising, because we hardly know anything about some of the Twelve. Moreover, given that some manuscripts have seventy, and others seventy-two, we can't even be certain of their numbers. What we *do* know is that these were chosen in addition to the Twelve and, presumably, had followed Jesus through some of the episodes and escapades which I mentioned earlier. One commentator suggested that some of the seventy-odd folks could have been people brought to Jesus after his sending out the Twelve; we simply cannot be sure. Either way, they were clearly men who shared something of Jesus's commitment to peace. They'd been told to offer a blessing of peace when they entered somebody's house, and if it was reciprocated by the occupants, it would remain with them. Proclaiming the proximity

of the Kingdom of God, and bearing peace, were bound up together, and both were a risky business. After all, it is not for nothing that the disciples were given instructions for how to handle rejection on their way, brushing the dirt off their feet as they moved on...

Our Old Testament passage also talks about peace, this time in the context of a beleaguered Israel longing to return home from exile in Babylon. Part of the third and latest segment of Isaiah, the period it relates to had witnessed the city of Jerusalem being reduced to utter ruin, and it would hence need extensive rebuilding. However, God's promise here is that she would be restored, and thus become like a mother-figure through whom God's children could find nourishment, shelter and – most importantly within this context – a real and lasting peace. This hope that God's peace could break through came about as a result of that period of captivity, focused upon the idea that God would send the Messiah to restore the people to wholeness, so that they might dwell with God once more. Peter had already recognised Jesus as being the One who would do that, but not in the way which many hoped for. He was not a military leader there to overthrow the hated Roman rule, but instead his way was that of the cross and so that of a peace that would embrace not just the people of Israel, but – following his death and resurrection – the whole of creation.

So, what are we to make of all this today? Well, there're many things one could say, but I want to focus on one simple, but very important, aspect of the story: the seventy-odd disciples were not exceptional, super-holy, people who had everything sorted out, no more than the Twelve were. Instead, the folks Jesus called to be his ambassadors and peacemakers were, above all else, really ordinary people. They struggled, as we sometimes do, to get their head around things, as we see when Jesus told his friends of his death and resurrection for a third time, and still nobody knew what he was on about. They had their faults and failings, and like the principal characters in the movie I'd mentioned earlier – Tom the antisocial eye-doctor, Joost with his

excessive love of food, Sarah with her damaged past, and Jack with all of his many quirks – they were sometimes reluctant pilgrims, who struggled with having their barriers being broken down by those met on the road. Yet, like us, these seventy disciples were the very ones Jesus commissioned and trusted to bear peace within a world which desperately needed it. May we have the courage to take up the call.

Recommended Resource of the Week

The 2010 film *The Way* explores pilgrimage from a range of different perspectives amid searches for peace.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray:

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring good news to the poor.
We pray for all those who struggle to make ends meet,
for those having to choose between food and heating,
and those who are worried about what the future holds.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring release to the captives.
We pray for prisoners of conscience throughout the world,
for those living under oppressive regimes and dictatorships,
and the work of human rights organisations and advocates.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring recovery of sight to the blind.
We pray for everyone who struggles to trust they are loved,
for those blinded by affluence, self-interest or greed,
and all those who have lost sight of you in the midst of life.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

God of freedom and hope,
you came to bring freedom to the oppressed.
We pray for those experiencing isolation and loneliness,
for all victims and survivors of abuse of any kind,
and those struggling with ill health in body, mind or spirit.
God of endless love, **hear our prayer.**

God of freedom and hope,
your Son came to proclaim the year of your favour.
Look kindly upon us in all of our struggles and trials,
and in this time of quiet and stillness,
pour out your love on those people and situations
that we now bring before you...

Lord's Prayer

Blessing