Mission is not optional. It’s what we are called for.

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Pentecost + 3 Matt 9.35 – 10.15, Gen 18.1-15

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [Mt 9.36] People responded to that; they felt his compassion. And we still do. It makes a real difference. So many times I’m with a person who’s very sick or close to death and they say, “I don’t know how anyone faces something like this without Him! It would be so terribly lonely and sad. I’m so blessed.” … They’re suffering, but they know they’re blessed. They’re okay

Jesus came to ordinary people – to his own people. In his time, they were manipulated and crushed – collateral damage, sandwiched between an overseas power and local, self-serving elites. Not much changes, does it? Ordinary people’s well-being never figures in big power games. Simple families and villages: a drought year, an illness could paralyse them; tip them over the edge from subsistence into ruin. Our news here is filled with situations like that today; families living in cars – the working poor.

The ordinary people Jesus went to longed for God’s promised anointed one to come and help them? Where was God in their pain? How could the loving, just God of the prophets allow this to happen? Jesus did come … he came to give them God’s deep, real love. Ordinary people now also feel harassed and helpless; they need to know God’s love for them. They’re searching. But they’re not looking for Jesus because they don’t know about him. Why? His love is free, and there are Christians all over the place who’ve been commissioned to

share his love. The harvest is plentiful. Are the reapers asleep?

Tragically, in our time and in our society, the love of Jesus is not even on the radar for many ordinary people in Adelaide. I'm one of the baby-boomer generation, and most of my peers in that generation had no exposure to the idea that God loves us. Parents of my friends – the WW II generation – had asked the same question that the villagers around Jesus asked – how could a God who is meant to be loving allow such suffering? And hearing no credible answer, they saw no point in introducing their children to faith. That means many of our grandchildren – the grandchildren of the baby boomer generation – are now the third generation of Australians who've never even heard of the Gospel; never heard that Jesus loves them. All they hear about the church is our institutional disgrace; as if that's all we are. That can't be allowed to paralyse us.

When they are suffering or dying, these lost generations won't have the chance to say what I hear from people like you: "I don't know how anyone faces something like this without Jesus! It would be so terribly lonely and sad. I'm so blessed." They can't say that. Yet Jesus came for these ordinary people. He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

They've been blocked from God's grace – maybe by the tragic effect of war; maybe because the people around them follow the cult of youth, beauty and wealth, maybe because people who could have made a difference didn't. Maybe it's because of the inaction of us church-goers who could have shown them Christ's love. We used to have common sayings like God love you; God bless you; God be with you that one's hidden in the word 'goodbye'. It's so simple to let people know that God loves them.

The church began because God didn't want people locked out of

Love. So in Jesus, God came to us. He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in synagogues, and telling the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. [9.35] Just because it's now the 21st century doesn't mean people don't suffer any less than we did back then; and material progress doesn't mean our spiritual life is no longer necessary. There are still people all around us, looking for meaning, looking for love, looking for whoever it is that they can thank for the miracle of their being. And every week, we declare here that we are the body of Christ; Christ, hiding in full view, mute!

We are called to respond to people's genuine search. They're suffering, and a genuine response begins with compassion. Today, we saw Jesus show his disciples how it's done. He went out to these people and when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them; he made a difference. He showed God's love – openly. This story challenges us to share God's love too. That list of disciples we just read, this story challenges us to remember that your name and mine were added to their honour-roll at our baptism. We've grown up learning about the love of God for us and for all families of the earth – again today, we saw how Jesus felt, and how he acted on his compassion. In the Jewish – Christian tradition, if we're taught something, we're obliged to pass it on.

Jesus' disciples – ordinary people like us – saw what Jesus did, and they heard what he said. His love was palpable. It's probably why they answered his call to be his disciples. Today, we saw Jesus send his disciples out on their first mission. A great teacher, he taught by example; he taught with passion. His disciples could be in no doubt about why he sent them out; no doubt about the depth of commitment he asked of them. They went out bearing his love; emulating his compassion; sharing the blessing there is in knowing Jesus. And we are sent out to do just that, and with just that commitment; sent out into an enormous harvest. We have three

generations to reach.

The reason for the call of Abraham and Sarah was that through them, all families of Earth might be blessed. The call to the Church is the same one. God’s Mission is the very reason the disciples or the Church exist. Mission is not optional. It’s what we are called for. So let’s start with the grandchildren. God be with you! Amen