



## The Apostle (who sends us)

The early chapters of Mark's gospel describe Jesus ministry of preaching and teaching in Galilee. Mark describes the way Jesus calls fishermen: Simon and Andrew, James and John and then later a tax collector called Levi. Each of them leave everything to follow him. Jesus is drawing together a new community of disciples, men and women who travelled together and shared common meals.

And then in Mark 3 comes a solemn moment in the gospel.

“Jesus went up the mountain, and called to him those whom he wanted and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him and to be sent out to proclaim the message....”

One short phrase catches the whole rhythm of the Christian life, the rhythm of the Eucharist and the whole rhythm of our discipleship” “to be with him and to be sent out”.

Jesus calls us, like the twelve, to live in this rhythm of being with Jesus together and being sent out. We are all disciples, we come to Jesus to learn his ways and his character and his nature and his mission. And we are all apostles: the word means simply those who are sent.

Mark 3.14 is a statement about the community, the church which is forming around Jesus. We know that in part because of the number of disciples and apostles is twelve, the same number as the twelve tribes of Israel. The twelve represent the new, reformed people of God.

This rhythm of being with Jesus and being sent out is meant to run through the whole of our lives. The rhythm is centred once again around meeting Jesus in the Eucharist. Week by week we are called together around the table of the Lord to be with him in scripture, in fellowship in sung and spoken worship and in the sacrament. Week by week we find forgiveness,

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we find bread for the journey and rest in the vine, we are drawn into the worship of heaven. And then, week by week we are sent out to be the people of God in the world, in every part of our lives.

Meeting Christ as the one who sends in the Eucharist is deeply personal for me. When I was fifteen or sixteen years of age, the Christian faith became my own in a service of Holy Communion. I'd always had a faith in God. My parents were not regular church goers at the time but they sent me to Sunday School. I was held within the family of the local Church in Halifax growing up. As a young teenager, I asked lots of questions and explored and tested my faith. But faith wasn't yet personal, it wasn't yet my own.

When I was in my mid teens, I went away on a youth weekend with other young people from the diocese to a retreat centre near Harrogate called Barrowby House. Barrowby had a beautiful chapel, with a picture window looking out over the Yorkshire countryside. The weekend ended with a final Eucharist on the Sunday morning. Through that Eucharist, the risen Christ spoke to me very powerfully and called me to follow.

The element which spoke most powerfully was the invitation and sense of being sent. All these years later there are two elements in that service I can remember very clearly.

The first was praying and understanding the prayer which we now use at the end of nearly every service of Holy Communion. It's a prayer based on this verse from Romans 12, an invitation to offer all of our lives in the service of God:

"I appeal to you therefore brothers and sisters by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12.1).

This is the prayer of thanksgiving, taken from that verse, which I know you will recognise, At the centre of the prayer is offering our lives to God and being sent right:

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Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.  
Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

Through that prayer I was able to make an offering of myself to God in soul and body and every time I say the prayer I make the same offering. I was able to respond to the call Isaiah heard in the temple and through the prayer say to the Lord, Here I am, send me.

The second element was singing together as the final hymn in the service, Lord Jesus Christ by Patrick Appleford and written originally for his church youth group. I was especially moved by the second verse and the final verse. The second verse describes the Eucharist in these words:

You have commanded us to do  
This in remembrance Lord of you  
Into our lives your power breaks through,  
Living Lord.

The final verse is built around the idea of offering our lives, being sent:

Lord Jesus Christ  
I would come to you  
Live my life for you,  
Son of God.  
All your commands I know are true,  
Your many gifts will make me new,  
Into my life your power breaks through,  
Living Lord.



More than fifty years later I can still remember the grace of God in that moment, the sense of being called and sent in the final words of the service, which again we hear in every Eucharist:

Go in peace to the love and serve the Lord  
In the name of Christ, Amen.

We are called as disciples and we are sent as apostles.

In the Roman Catholic Church and in some Anglican churches, the service of Holy Communion is called the mass. The word mass comes from the Latin term 'Mitto', I send. The love of Christ sends us out into God's world to love, to trust and to hope together.

The idea of mission, of being sent, is fundamental to the nature of God. God's love for the world overflows in the creation of the world and in the making of humankind in God's image. The God of mission sends the patriarchs and prophets, kings and priests to form a people for himself and to guide that people in God's ways.

In the fulness of time the God of mission sends his own Son to be our Saviour. In the famous words of John 3.16:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life"

The Letter to the Hebrews calls Jesus himself the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (Hebrews 3.1). Jesus is himself an apostle, sent by God. In Jesus' great high priestly prayer in John 17, the Lord reminds us over and over again that he is sent from God and that he now sends the disciples into the world:

"As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17.18). These same words are echoed after the resurrection by the risen Lord:

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“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 21.21).

The little words in those verses “so” and “as” are very important. We are sent into the world week by week in the same way that God sent Jesus in the world: with humility, as servants, in love, bearing the message of Christ and continuing the mission of God.

And then the Father and the Son together send the Spirit. Jesus equips those he sends with the same grace and power of God for God’s mission in the world. John 21 continues in this way:

“When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20.22-23).

So Christ calls us, forgives us, feeds us and inspires us in the Eucharist and then sends us out into the world. What does all of this mean for us week by week?

We all have a common calling to share in God’s mission of love for the world. At the heart of that calling is love. We are to love our families, our neighbours, our friends, the stranger in our midst. We are to live out what the Anglican Communion calls the five marks of God’s mission: to proclaim the kingdom of God through our whole lives; to preach and teach and baptise new believers; to offer loving service in the wider community; to challenge unjust structures and work for justice and for peace and to tend and treasure the earth.

Within that common calling, Christians have their own particular callings according to the gifts God has given to us and the needs of the church and for the world.

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One of those callings is to share in the ministry of the Church and the ministry of the Eucharist in different ways. We are in a place now as a church when we need many more vocations to ordained ministry from people at every stage of life and every part of our community. It is such a privilege to preside at the gathering of God's people as together we meet with Jesus and are sent out. I hope and pray that through Come and See this year many more people will hear God's call to offer to share in this ministry in the months and years to come. My own call to be a priest came just a year or so after that powerful experience of God's grace on the youth weekend.

But there are many gifts and many callings. In the words of the great Methodist covenant service:

Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult;  
Some bring honour, others bring reproach;  
Some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests,  
Others are contrary to both  
In some we may please Christ and please ourselves;  
In others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves  
Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.

You may want to take a moment to reflect on your own calling and vocation as we draw to the end of Come and See this year. How is Christ calling you to serve him at this point in your life? How are you devoting your best gifts and abilities to God's service. Is there an offer you need to make, a question you need to ask, a conversation you need to have? Do you need to explore a particular aspect of the Christian life and faith?

Whatever your response may God bless you richly in the next part of the journey.

John and Charles Welsey the founders of Methodism were ordained as Anglicans in our own Cathedral. Their memorial is at the foot of the pulpit

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steps. Both John and Charles played their part in helping Anglicans and Methodists deepen our understanding of the Eucharist: Charles through his hymnody and John through his preaching.

John Wesley called Holy Communion a converting ordinance: a command of Christ – do this in remembrance of me – but also a gift of God’s mercy and grace to draw us deeper into Christ and give us food for the journey.

My prayer is that through Come and See this year we will all encounter the risen Christ afresh as the one who welcomes us, cleanses us from sin, strengthens us for the journey, gives us a place to rest and belong, draws us deeper into the worship of heaven and sends us out in the world.

But as the final part of Come and See, let’s remember one of the very greatest of the Easter stories. On the first Easter Day according to Luke, two disciples walk to Emmaus, heading in the wrong direction, away from Jerusalem. A stranger draws near to them. The risen Christ listens to the pain of his grieving disciples but they do not recognise him.

In the second part of the journey, he teaches them from the Scriptures everything concerning himself. They will later say that their hearts burned within them but still they do not recognise him.

They come to the place to which they were going. The stranger walks ahead as if he were going on. But they urge him to stay with them. And then Luke writes:

“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them”. The same words used in the feeding of the five thousand and at the Last Supper.

“Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him and he vanished from their sight”

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Immediately they return to Jerusalem, sent out to bear witness to the resurrection.

“Then they told what had happened to them and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread”

May each of us, in all our lives, meet the Risen Christ in the Eucharist and be able to say to others, Come and see!