

Sermon notes on Matthew 9 vv 35 – 38; Luke 2 vv 16 - 18
‘Jesus is the heart of who we share’

I have some Good News for you all, there are only 61 days until it's Christmas!! You have only 61 more days to buy all the necessary gifts and food, to write your cards, to wrap your presents and do what needs to be done!! I love the Nativity story because it is filled to the brim with Good News and the people who've been changed by it. The best and most comedic example of this are the Shepherds. Having been scared out of their skins by the visit of angels they then go to find this baby King asleep in a manger by waking everyone up in Bethlehem until they've found him. The funniest bit is that having woken everyone up, they then go and wake everyone up again to tell them the Good News of a new King born for them. They are highly motivated people and Jesus is highly motivated too as he looks up and sees all these people around him. He sees their situation and he describes the sheer wonder of what the Good News is and he prays that we too may be as motivated by this Good News as well.

This week I've been at the annual YBA conference at Cober Hill near Scarborough. The key speaker was Alan Donaldson who is the highly motivated leader of the European Baptist Fellowship and he lives out the truth that Jesus' yoke is easy and his burden is light; in Matthew 11 verse 30. One of the reasons for this is the training and coaching he's had to fulfil his natural abilities and passion. But he also admitted one thing, he doesn't find personal evangelism easy, you could say it is a heavy burden. His response is that he years to be trained in this that he might have confidence to do so and this will make the burden less heavy, though it may never become light. Simon Russell and I had a chat with Nike Adebajo about our progress we've made after our July Vision Day. We talked about how evangelism and prayer had emerged as the two key areas of the six we would focus on. Nike then spoke very passionately urging us to be bold, imaginative and creative in how we pursue this. One of her emphases was that it is to be something **WE** do together by letting it be shaped by the burden **YOU** think is light. A 'light' burden is when we do something because it is our passion and when we do it is neither onerous nor daunting for us. Like the shepherds, it is when we are filled with enthusiasm and joy because Jesus has got hold of our hearts and continues to inspire us to live it out. Let me give you a couple of examples:

One is Simon Temple and the ukulele group and the other is myself and schools' ministry. Both Simon and I have seen God at work through us and I hope that we might inspire and encourage you to share Jesus in your own 'light' way too. I know there are many of us who carry a 'light burden' for

sharing the Good News and I would love it if **WE** all inspired and encouraged each other in the many ways we can do this. This is where prayer matters. When we pray about evangelism we do not pray just for people to meet Jesus, as important as that is. Instead, we are to pray asking Jesus to empower each of us anew that we may all continue to do the things which we love to do to share Jesus

We live in a hard mission field which means that we need to think, live and work creatively and imaginatively. In our Church Members' Covenant, we speak of Enabling all to meet Jesus, we describe ourselves as witnesses, as new creation and as a people who pray. This is unashamedly my language, which means that it is language which I love, **BUT** I know it also needs the breath of the Spirit we know in Scripture for it to come alive in us today. In Matthew 9 we read that Jesus looked up and when he did so, he felt compassion for the crowds he saw around him. It was not their need which touched his heart, but their desperation. He uses two metaphors to describe what he feels. The first is that they were like sheep without a shepherd. He saw they were distressed by the many pressures of daily life, that they were powerless, fearful and prone to panic. Secondly, he saw that they were as frail and as fragile as wheat, which is easy to crush, to break and to destroy. The Good News he offers them is himself – as a Shepherd and as a barn. When you meet people in the street, or in a queue, in school, shops, work, gym or play what do you see? What metaphor do you use to make it personal to you? Is it one which helps to point people to Jesus as Good News, because you know it is Jesus who is Good News to you?

One of the best bits of the two Wednesday evenings is when Giles and Andy, though actually his name is Andrzej which is Polish for Andy and pronounced 'An-jay', is the lightness of their burden to tell others in street evangelism. It is inspiring to hear them speak so, but it is also, frankly terrifying. There is still room for you to come and join in on 4th and 11th November and think of it as an opportunity for you to be inspired to think more about what your light burden for evangelism might be. But also, how this might inspire all us of us to share Jesus as Good News in a way we've never imagined before and so come to love Jesus more and more and more in ways we'd never imagined before too.