

St Mary Maldon
14th June 2020.
Live stream Mass
Trinity 1

See I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves.

The warning Jesus gave to his disciples as they were commissioned for their task of spreading the Gospel.

But sometimes we may think, living in Maldon, it doesn't apply to us.

It's a friendly town.

When I walk down the High Street, people stop and talk to me.

When I visit people they welcome me.

There is community spirit.

There are few signs of wanton vandalism.

We don't have to step over beggars and the homeless in the street.

We can easily think all's right with the world.

So what do we make of Jesus' statements, "The crowds were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd"

"I am sending you out like sheep amongst wolves."

Has everything changed since Jesus lived in first century Palestine?

If we extend our horizons a bit from Maldon High Street, I am not sure it has.

I hear a sermon a few years ago from a priest, who is now a bishop in the north of England.

He talked about when he was a vicar in Camden.

As a high church priest he used to walk about in his cassock.

He said he regularly got spat at.

People would shout, "Paedophile" and other insults at him.

Sheep among wolves would have resonated with him.

I wonder if you were watching the news on Sunday evening.

What did you see?

A protest in Bristol as part of the "Black People Matter" campaign.

And you would have seen a statue of Edward Colston, the slave trader being thrown into the River Avon.

What was your reaction to that, I wonder?

My first gut reaction was to think, "Brilliant, we need to get rid of statues to people like that"

A good job done.

Then my cerebral reaction came in and I thought, “We can’t just take the law into our own hands in a democracy, there are other ways of achieving our aims.”

Whatever you or I thought of the incident, it has had wide ranging ramifications.

The statue is not to be put up again, it is to be put in the slavery section of the museum.

Questions are being asked about other controversial statues, Cecil Rhodes in Oxford, Baden Powell in Poole, and even Winston Churchill in Parliament Square which has been boarded up.

Certain racist comedies have been removed from Britbox.

Nigel Farage has been sacked from his LBC show because of his comments on the incident.

All of this has divided opinion.

The newspapers and other media are full of it.

Boris Johnson defending Churchill.

A group of scouts preventing the Baden Powell statue from being removed.

What does all this tell us about our society.

That we are bitterly divided.

That there are groups in society who feel they are not being treated fairly.

They do not have justice.

They include groups representing black people and other ethnic minorities.

“Black people matter.” They say.

But we have powerful groups representing women’s rights.

Groups representing the gay community who feel they are discriminated against.

And of course we have seen demonstrations from people in low paid jobs, what in my youth were called the working class.

We don’t live in a comfortable society.

We are a divided people.

We have a society where people are angry about injustices.

We have a society which is not at peace with itself.

We have a society which is harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, to quote today’s Gospel.

There used to be a view held by some that Christianity was about leading a good moral life, go to church and we would be assured of salvation.

And that we shouldn’t dirty our hands with the problems of the world.

Religion and politics don’t mix.

The problem with that view is it is not what the Gospel teaches.
Jesus in today's passage is telling those disciples to get out there into society, and get their hands dirty, or in fact to get their feet dirty.
Our mission must be to show Christ's love and peace.
To stand alongside those who are fighting injustice.
To be working for a fairer society without hatred and discrimination.
To be promoting a society that is not based on the acquisition of wealth at the expense of others.
We may not have the slave trade as represented by Edward Colston, but many in society today see themselves as little more than slaves to the system.

We, as Christ's disciples can only show his love for all by working for peace.
That is not easy.
Just as Jesus suffered his followers are called to suffer.
Paul says, "Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope."

In today's Gospel Jesus is sending people out to minister to people, to meet whatever needs they have.
Like the early disciples we have to look at the needs of our society.
And at present that must include working for justice and peace.
Showing people, as Robert said in his sermon last week that all people are equal before God.
That all people are loved by God.
We must show that love in the world knowing that Jesus is with us.
I saw a quotation in the on line sermon written by my friend Andy Griffiths.
He quotes a theologian called Simone Weil.

"If you want to know if someone is truly spiritual, don't listen to what they say about God, listen to what they say about the world. It is in relation to the hurting, grieving, abused and disregarded that we discover whether we have hearts of flesh or hearts of stone."