

This is a time when I would have been with you in the Paddock Wood Deanery for one of my regular visits to the deaneries, and I am really sorry not to be, not least because I look back with pleasure on the last such visit I paid which included the memorable experience of your then Area Dean taking me out for a session of clay pigeon shooting something which I had never done before. And in all sorts of other ways too, I remember being encouraged and given things to think about by my visit to you and to your community, so I am genuinely sorry that I'm not able to be with you. We'll have to see whether a re-arrangement is possible at some stage, but, in any case, by this virtual means I give you my greetings in the name of our Lord and wish you God's grace and blessing at this difficult time.

The gospel reading which is set for Sunday 14th June from Matthew's gospel is Matthew's version of the sending out of the 12 by Jesus and as Jesus sends them out, so he says to them:

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*As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. [Matthew 10:7-8](#)*

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We'll come to that last phrase in a moment but that sending out, and those various reasons for which the sending is given, not least the curing of the sick has a significance for us at this time, now we can't most of us physically go out, although we're beginning to be able to, but whether physically or in other ways, we are still to see ourselves in succession to the disciples as sent people, as with a part of what it means to be an Apostolic Church. We are sent. We are sent out in an Apostolic way. We are sent to proclaim that the Kingdom is near and my experience, my listening to what's going on in our communities at the moment, is that people are finding new and fresh ways to, as it were, proclaim that the Kingdom of God is near, to demonstrate that nearness of God and of his kingly presence. We're doing it through the pastoral care we offer. We're doing it through being alongside the bereaved. We're doing it by sustaining worship and access to prayer and to Christian teaching and so forth, keeping alive that proclamation of the Kingdom and expressing it in different ways.

And then that interesting phrase. That phrase about how we are to see ourselves in terms of people who have received without payment. That is of course about grace. God's grace to us in Jesus Christ. God's overflowing grace, and there is nothing that we could give, nothing that we might have which would be sufficient to pay for the riches of that grace. It is something we cannot buy or earn. That little phrase echoes a passage in Isaiah 55 for example and there is that theme which runs through, that the goodness and the graciousness of God is so amazing that there is nothing we could give which will be sufficient to buy it. But there's a consequence which is the second part of the phrase "you receive without payment, give without payment". We are to give of ourselves of the message of the Kingdom in generous ways; we don't put conditions around it. It is an open gift from God to humankind and we are to be as God's sent people those through whom the offer of that gift is spreadable abroad.

So May God in this strange time and in what will continue to be strange times as we go forward from here, May God give you grace that you may be those who hold out the offer of that grace and as you are seen to embody a closeness of God's Kingdom in your communities.