

WEEK 2: MONDAY

Every so often, usually just after a change of government, there is a spate of political autobiographies, as former leaders do their best to cash in on the public's hunger to find out 'the inside story'. One of the most fascinating elements of such books, to me, is the description of the early days, when the young and more or less unknown politician gathers friends around him or her, makes sure that they are loyal, and gives them tasks to do as part of the campaign for leadership, part of the means of gathering support.

There is more to Matthew 10 than that, but not less. Jesus calls twelve of his followers — twelve out of several hundred who had been with him on and off up to this point — and gives them instructions, things to do on his behalf. This requires that they have cut their previous ties: there will be no regular fishing for Peter and Andrew, for James and John, while they are going about these new tasks.

Jesus entrusts them with an urgent mission, specifically to 'the house of Israel'. The Jewish people must hear the call of God's kingdom as soon as possible before, as Jesus had already predicted (8.11), the other nations will be brought in (21.43; 28.19). St Paul, reflecting on all this thirty years later, declared that the Messiah had become 'a servant to the circumcised' (that is, the Jewish people), in order to fulfill the ancient promises God had made to their ancestors, and that then the Gentiles, the non-Jews, would glorify God for his mercy (Romans 15.8—9). Matthew is very conscious of the promises to Israel, and of the fact that Jesus was fulfilling them in order that, through that fulfillment, the whole world might become the sphere of God's saving rule.

The Twelve (representing, of course, the ancient Twelve Tribes: Jesus is deliberately symbolizing the fact that God is renewing his people) are to do pretty much the same things that Jesus had been doing: healing, exorcizing, announcing the good news that God was becoming king at last. You might have thought that this good news would be received as such. But Jesus knew that many would reject it, because it didn't correspond to their expectations. They wanted a different sort of kingdom, one that would support and validate their own national and personal ambitions. Jesus therefore warns the disciples that their mission will be rejected by some, even though others will be enthusiastic.

This is an obvious warning for us as well. All of us like to be liked, and want to be wanted. But not everyone — not even the people we might imagine — will be pleased at the news that God is now running the world in a new way, the way Jesus was showing and teaching. The message of 'peace' (verse 13) is wonderful news for some, but it's unwelcome to those who have decided that the only solution is violence. That message, though, is as urgent today as it was two thousand years ago.

TODAY

Gracious Lord Jesus, make us instruments of your peace, and of your saving kingdom, wherever we go.