

## **JBUMA MISSION EMPHASIS BIBLE STUDY SERIES**

**SEPTEMBER 2022**

### **EMBRACING THE MYSTERY: GOD'S MISSION FIELD – PART 1**

**TOPIC: JESUS ON THE FARM**

**TEXT: LUKE 2:40 (MATTHEW 14:15-21)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the world, including in affluent and developed countries, people are rediscovering the importance of food. Without adequate and varied food, human life is difficult and sometimes impossible. There are many converging reasons for this rediscovery, including shrinking household incomes, and the rising cost of food even in farm shops and supermarkets. This is believed to be a reality that ought not to be overlooked nor brushed aside by the church. The farm is God's mission-field and the church must represent the mystery of the kingdom of God, even on the farm. In this regard, Jesus must be the paradigm that illicit our response. Let us look firstly at:

#### **JESUS AND JEWISH AGRARIANISM**

What is Agrarianism? Agrarianism is a social or political movement designed to bring about land reforms or to improve the economic status of the farmer. In the Jewish agrarian culture known to Jesus, even 'sold' fields should revert to their hereditary owners at jubilee; the Sabbath rest extended to fields and animals. The Jews did not cultivate fields to their very borders but left margins for wildlife. Some gleanings were left for the poor and strangers. Newly planted fruit trees were unharvested for three years; the fourth year's fruit belonged to God. Thereafter their owners could harvest them for food (cf. Lev. 19-25). According to Micah 4: and Zechariah 3:10, it was the ideal of every Jewish person to sit under their own fig and vine, and this included the sharing of fruit and shade with neighbours.

Nazareth was the home of Jesus for a major part of his life on earth. The gospels tell us little, explicitly, about the Nazareth years. Yet if we contemplate Jesus at Nazareth with the senses of the imagination, we discover Jesus at the centre of Nazareth's agrarian culture, obedient to His parents, and as a youth learning the ways of the soil in a family field.

Luke's gospel provides a precious clue, when he twice notices that Jesus grew 'in wisdom' at Nazareth (Luke. 2.40, 52). Jewish wisdom included more than abstract knowledge, it included

the ways of the local bio-system, how wise people worked with and not against the soil. Jesus, after growing in wisdom and learning the ways of the soil at Nazareth, He preached the kingdom in agrarian imagery. Let us look secondly at:

## **JESUS USING AGRARIAN PARABLES AND METAPHORS**

Jesus therefore lived as man in an agrarian, earth caring culture which explains His vivid metaphors and parables, not least those illustrated by seeds and fields. The seed scattered on fertile soil, the tiny mustard seed and the kingdom, seeds maturing slowly, figs and vines and the value of manure, rain and drought, olives and vines, invasive weeds, stony soil, golden fields at harvest ... Jesus' metaphors like biodiversity itself, are colourful.

Jesus preached the kingdom in metaphors related to food production. It is surely no accident that many of the parables of Jesus invoke agricultural images from the earth to describe the dynamics of the Reign of God in our world. There is more than a hint in the parables of Jesus that the earth and its cycle of life is an important key to a proper understanding of the present and future Reign of God. And if this is so then the church must reflect the kingdom through agrarianism.

## **THE AGRARIAN CHURCH ON THE GROUND**

The bible and our living tradition and our way of living need re-interpretation in theology, spirituality and practice. Our contemporary culture will certainly need global and local food security. Our Christian assistance of hungry people and our sharing agrarianism reflects Jesus in His sharing lifestyle. What are some of the ways we can do this? The story in Matthew 14: 15 and following demonstrates a few thoughts. After teaching the crowds in a desolate place; after having compassion and healing the sick, there was one crucial reality overlooked by the disciples but grabbed the attention of Jesus. The people were the recipients of Jesus' compassion, teaching and healing which catered for the spiritual needs but the physical need of food could not be replaced by the spiritual. When Jesus told the disciples to feed the people at least two concepts were introduced. 1) Food Sovereignty and 2) Food Justice.

## 1. THE CHURCH AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Food sovereignty is about being culturally connected to the food that we are growing and the food that we are eating. To do that, we should recognize the personhood in the human beings that are allowing us to have that. Food sovereignty is essentially how people and nations have the right to their food; have the right to define what agriculture and food policy happens surrounding their food. That can begin with farmers and how the food is produced to how the food is transported and then what it looks like when it comes to your table. So, from planting a seed to eating a banana for breakfast, food sovereignty makes sure every step of the food process is as fair and sustainable as possible. We see this in many instances with Jesus; from the mode of breaking of bread around the communion table to the feeding of the multitude on the mountain. Food sovereignty is broken down into six pillars:

- a) **FOOD FOR PEOPLE:** This speaks to producing food that is healthy and accessible to all people and communities no matter the region they live in, or their socioeconomic status. The right to food which is healthy and culturally appropriate is the basic legal demand underpinning food sovereignty. Guaranteeing it requires policies which support diversified food production in each region and country. Food is not simply another commodity to be traded or speculated on for profit. It is first and foremost food for people to consume.
- b) **VALUING FOOD PROVIDERS:** Respecting the rights of the farmers who produce and harvest our food and making sure that policies are not taking advantage of them or jeopardizing their livelihoods. Jesus is big on justice. Congregants need to be careful how we devalue the farmers by crying down their prices and forgetting the intense labour that goes into the cultivation. Farmers are often pushed off their land by mining concerns, road development or agribusiness. Food sovereignty asserts food providers' right to live and work in dignity.
- c) **LOCALIZING FOOD SYSTEMS:** Food must be seen primarily as sustenance for the community and only secondarily as something to be traded. The 'free trade' policies which prevent developing countries from protecting their own agriculture, for example through subsidies and tariffs, are also inimical to food sovereignty. Food for Jesus was not economics, it was a right for people to have food.
- d) **MAKING DECISIONS LOCALLY:** This gives food producers control over their own crops, but more on how they decide to graze their land, water their crops and

conserve their livestock. Basically giving them the option to be more sustainable in their own way. Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock, and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. Privatisation of such resources, for example through intellectual property rights regimes or commercial contracts, is explicitly rejected.

- e) **BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS:** Food sovereignty allows farmers to pass down generational knowledge and harvesting practices rather than force food providers to adapt to expensive and threatening technology like genetic engineering. Instead, food sovereignty calls for appropriate research systems to support the development of agricultural knowledge and skills. There are many skills sets that can be had from our local small farmers that are most effective and sustainable.
- f) **WORKING WITH NATURE:** This sixth pillar speaks to finding the harmony between agriculture and ecological processes that improve the conditions of the planet, especially during a climate crisis. The land we used to grow crops and raise livestock is responsible for approximately one quarter of the world's greenhouse emissions and it's mostly because current industrial practices are not sustainable. A lot of large-scale farming is dependent on oil, which is used in fertilizers, pesticides and heavy production machinery. Then there are global distribution systems that contribute heavily to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. And if we keep farming like this, it will just contribute to more climate change, which in turn will impact harvest yields. It's a vicious cycle.

The idea of food sovereignty is to heal the planet and reject industrialized production methods, which contributes heavily to the climate crisis. We have the solutions. Local farmers ought to practice sustainable farming. Things like managing water wisely, avoiding toxic chemicals, promoting biodiversity, and overall strengthening nearby ecosystems. It's just a matter of leaving the idea of industrial agriculture behind and embracing more sustainable agricultural practices in our respective communities.

Let us start by supporting your own community and buying from local farmers and local supermarkets that hold high standards for fair treatment of workers and care for the environment or support food justice organizations.

## **2. THE CHURCH AND FOOD JUSTICE**

Food justice is about making sure that people have the tools and resources that they need to make the food choices that they want. It is the right to have healthy food in abundance in your home or in your community. Food justice is the decision to make healthy food available to everyone, independent of their income; independent of their skin color; independent of where they live. Everyone needs to have access to those basic foods that keep them healthy. When Jesus told the disciple, “You give them something to eat,” Jesus was saying food should be available to those who need it when they need it. And when they need it there must be choice available and a part of that choice includes some healthy choices. Food justice is access to the opportunity of healthier items and access to food, the story around food and the implication of that story on the community that is telling it.

The Agrarian Jesus calls us to place a premium on the farm as food is a basic need of life. Amen.

## **EMBRACING THE MYSTERY: GOD’S MISSION FIELD - PART 2**

### **TOPIC: JESUS AT THE SEASIDE**

**TEXT: LUKE 8:26-39**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Up to this point Jesus’ ministry has been characterized by some healings, which were enough to make the people take notice and some powerful and challenging speeches, such as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. But the act of calming the storm raises the stake: it shows that the healer and teacher also controls the elements of the created order—specifically, the sea. This act is infused with theological significance.

Jesus and his disciples get into their boat and without warning find themselves surrounded by violent wind and frothy waves that surely signal their doom. They wake the napping Jesus and complain that their end is near. Jesus chides them for their lack of faith—which here means “trust”—and “rebukes” the wind and waves and returns the sea to utter calm.

Putting the sea back in its place and keeping people from harm is an unmistakable allusion to God’s work in the Old Testament. God tamed the watery chaos in Genesis 1, bringing the swirling, chaotic, primeval waters under control. Psalm 104:7 puts it this way: “At your rebuke, the waters fled.” This “defeat of watery chaos” is also seen in the flood story and the crossing of the Red Sea: divine deliverance from a watery threat.

Rebuking the raging sea and saving those on the boat forges a theological connection between Jesus and the mighty acts of God. The chaos-tamer is among them. This sets Jesus apart as one who truly has the right to be heard. The disciples put it well: “What kind of man is this?”

The disciples knew Jesus well enough to turn to him for help, “Lord, save us!” But they are only now beginning to understand that he is more than they thought. Their rabbi and companion, napping from exhaustion, can wake up and rebuke the water back to its place. But the theme I was given is Jesus at the seaside, not Jesus on the sea.

The text before us introduces the story of the “Gerasene demoniac” at the seaside. In this story we find chatty demons, suicidal swine, instantaneous healing. He haunts the places of the dead. Every night, the townspeople heard him, shrieking among the tombs. When they are quick enough, they catch him, wrap his wrists and ankles in chains, and haul his naked body —

securely shackled — back to town. But there is no containing the crazy; he escapes each time. He wanders the wilds, tearing at his skin until it bleeds, trading one kind of pain for another. If he has a name, no one knows it. If he has a history, no one remembers it. If he is worth saving as a living corpse, no one seems to care. No one looks. Until Jesus shows up! When Jesus comes a few things happened. First:

### **JESUS ASKS THE INTOLERABLE QUESTION ABOUT OUR IDENTITY**

This story is our story because it begins precisely where we ourselves need to begin, and that is with our identity. “What is your name?” Jesus asks when he first encounters the possessed man by the seaside. Remember, the man approaches Jesus, not to ask for help, but to push Jesus away. Maybe to scare Jesus away! In all likelihood, his approach is violent and wild. But Jesus asks for a name, anyway, and by doing so, he begins to recall the broken man to himself; to his humanity; to his beginnings; to his unique and precious identity as a child beloved of God.

What is your name? Has there ever been a more loving, searching question? What would happen if you allowed Jesus to ask it of you? What would happen if you asked it of others? Who are you? Who are you, really? Who are you beneath the labels and the diagnoses, the pretence and the piety, the fear and the shame? Who are you when no one in this world is looking? What name do you yearn to be called in the lonely stretches of the night? Who were you before you lost yourself? Before something vital in you died? Do you even remember?

Jesus begins where we must begin. Jesus begins with an honest questioning and naming of ourselves. Can we allow Him to search us so deeply? Can we hear Him asking the tender and intolerable question: What is your name? Who are you?

Second Point:

### **JESUS KNOWS THE UNFLINCHING TRUTH ABOUT OUR CONDITION**

The story is our story because it tells us the unflinching truth about our condition. “Legion,” the man says in response to Jesus’ question. My name is Legion. This means a multitude; vast host; an incalculable swarm. The sources of his brokenness are myriads. The assault on his mind, soul, and body is multi-pronged; it comes from many sources braided together.

Perhaps it does not matter how we choose to explain these demons. Regardless of what language we use: biblical, theological, medical, sociological, what we know for sure is that the

man's condition strips him of sanity, dignity, and community. It keeps him in isolation. It renders him anonymous. It encourages him to mutilate his own body. It deadens his soul and divides his mind. In short, it deprives him of self-control, and propels him towards self-destruction.

The truth is what ails us as a human being is Legion. The evil that haunts us has many faces, many names. We are all vulnerable to forces that seek to take us over, to bind our mouths, to take away our true names, and to separate us from God and from each other.

Some of us suffer from depression or anxiety. Some of us are addicted to sex, alcohol, etcetera. Some of us are slaves to the internet, or prone to bitterness, or caught up in cycles of dishonesty. Some of us cannot shake traumatic memories. Some of us were abused as children. Some of us are imprisoned within systems of injustice that stretch back so many years, we cannot imagine liberation. Some of us experience our skin colour, our accents, our genders, or our sexualities as magnets for other people's hatred. Some of us suffer illnesses that criss-cross the boundaries of medicine and culture, nature and nurture.

And Third:

### **FALLING DOWN BEFORE JESUS**

This story is our story because it tells us exactly where salvation lies. When the demoniac sees Jesus, he falls before Him. When the townspeople come running to see what is going on, they find the man "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." Salvation, in other words, lies at the feet of Jesus. It lies in surrendering to the one who alone has the power to cast out the horrors which torment us. This is because evil in all of its incarnations find Jesus Christ of Nazareth terrifying. It is because there is no death-dealing power in this universe that can withstand the saving, healing, and resurrecting power of Jesus. It is because even the most destructive demons we can conjure up beg for mercy when Jesus Christ comes to town.

When Jesus comes to town every marine spirit must bow, every water spirit must bow, every leviathan spirit must bow, every python spirit must bow, every monitoring spirit must bow, every elemental spirit must bow, every merman or mermaid spirit must bow. All the spirits that are associated with the sea must bow. Could it be a spirit that was influencing the storm on the sea that precedes this story? And if it is a spirit, what is the name of that spirit?

What is the story we offer to the "possessed" who walks through our doors each Sunday? Is it a story we even believe anymore? Our hope is grounded in what Jesus Christ has already done;

in the power He has already demonstrated. It means we have every reason to share the Good News with confidence now.

Fourth Point:

### **JESUS COMMISSIONED THE HEALED MAN**

The story ends with Jesus commissioning the healed man to stay where he is and serve as the first missionary to his town people — the same town people who feared, shunned, trapped, and shackled him for years. Isn't this just like Jesus? Jesus chooses the very people we consider the most unholy, the most unredeemable, the most repulsive and unworthy — and commission them to teach us the Gospel? That is God all over.

Here, then, is a story about our truest names. Here is a story about resistance and resurrection. Here is a story about the Jesus who finds us naked among the tombs, clothes us with dignity, scatters the demons to save our souls and turns us into storytellers who will help heal the world. Here is our story. Amen.

**EMBRACING THE MYSTERY: GOD'S MISSION FIELD - PART 3**  
**TOPIC: JESUS IN THE HOUSE**  
**TEXT: LUKE 10:38-42**

**INTRODUCTION**

The text before us tells us that when Jesus shows up in Bethany, Martha welcomes Jesus into her house. In that context, hosting someone was not a trivial matter. People would take hosting very seriously because hosting is synonymous to worship. The nature of your hosting reflects the respect you have for the guest. A failure to host correctly would be an insult to your guest. Simultaneously, a failure to worship correctly is an insult to God. With a guest like Jesus, Martha is concerned and consumed, with everything she must do, with little or no regards to who she could become in the presence of Jesus. In our churches; in our work world; in our respective household are we more interested in the things we do or in the person we become? There are at least three observations to be made from this story, firstly:

**MARTHA FAILED TO HOST CORRECTLY IN THE PRESENCE OF JESUS**

Martha seemed to be caught up with the physical house being cleaned. Likened to our time it could have been floors being swept, carpets being vacuumed, toilets being flushed, dinner being fixed, etcetera. With all what Martha was doing, the bible describes her as being distracted. Martha missed the essence of what it means to be in the presence of Jesus right there in her house. While the external preparation is necessary, when it comes on to Jesus, it is the internal preparation that is paramount. God is more concerned about the readiness of the heart.

With all this preparation being done by Martha, Jesus described it as distraction. The Greek word translated as distracted means to be over occupied; overly concerned; overly consumed. Does this sound like idolatry to you? Anything or anyone who gets your attention over and about the Master will sign you up as a great candidate for idolatry.

With idolatry, God clearly forbids the making of statues to worship, and it is true that our family may have never done that. But idols do not have to be made of wood and stone. They can just as easily be more intangible things. In fact, John Calvin said that our hearts are idol factories, constantly making counterfeit gods. The things we idolize are not always sinful in and of themselves. In fact, they are often good things which have been given as gifts from God. The problem comes when we forget the Giver and instead worship the gift. When we expect a gift

to function as our god rather than enjoying it with gratitude toward God, we twist its purpose and the good gift turns rotten.

For example, power can be a good thing if used for the right purposes, but it becomes a terrible thing when it is pursued at all costs. Fame can be a platform to share hope and help, but it becomes a dangerous thing when the pursuit of it becomes our master. Wealth can be wonderful if it is shared generously, but it becomes a toxic thing when it becomes our single-minded focus. Popularity can be a fine thing if we're using it to build community, but it can become a destructive thing when we crave it and feel empty when we can't get more and more.

What is paramount to you in your house? What is it that gets most of your attention? Martha was caught up with everything else but Jesus. You can become caught up with the house God has blessed you with, that it robs you of quiet time with Jesus; you can become so caught up with your kid's performance in school that you fail to remember who is behind all that brilliance. Martha is so consumed and concerned with the house. She was in the very presence of Jesus but her focus was on everything but Jesus. Be careful to let your focus be on Jesus.

Martha is consumed and concerned with all that she has to do. Martha is getting it done and she needs some help. She is frustrated that Mary is not breaking her worship to do house chores. Jesus is in the house, yet Martha is telling Jesus to tell Mary to help her. You are in the presence of Jesus, the one who walks on water, the one who raises the dead, the one who turns water into wine, the one who flung the stars into space and you ask Him to tell somebody else to help you? Martha has completely missed the moment. In the presence of the Lord, she has missed what worship is all about.

Secondly:

### **MARTHA DEVALUED HER RELATIONSHIP WITH MARY IN THE PRESENCE OF JESUS**

Martha was consumed; Martha was concerned. And everything was going well until she glanced over at her sister Mary, who was unconcerned and unconsumed about Martha and her externals. While Martha was caught up with her doing, Mary chose to sit at the feet of Jesus, listening intently. While Martha was busy with everything else, Mary chose to worship with a heart devoted only toward Jesus.

Look at the strife that Martha brings to her relationship with Mary. Look at the anger and frustration she brought to bear upon a two-sister relationship. Look at how upset Martha became with her sister. She is mad because Mary was worshipping and she was working. She lodged a complaint to Jesus about Mary's worship. But Jesus never speaks to Mary; he turned to Martha and declared that Mary chose the better part.

Jesus is saying that your strife and frustration with Mary are predicated on the choice you have made. Martha has lost the value of her relationship with her sister because of how she chose to worship. She is so uptight with everything else in life that her relationship with her sister is now becoming damaged. Anytime someone snaps at you unnecessarily, it's a clear indication that they have lost their peace. The issues that Martha was now concerned and consumed about have caused her to devalue her relationship with her sister. Martha was hurt, Martha was angry, Martha missed the opportunity to worship and Martha was distracted. How many relationships are destroyed by your Martha tendencies?

When the comparison was made with what Mary was doing, Martha became aggravated by Mary. Did you know that your devotion to God can aggravate the people in your house? While you are getting your praise on your family member can become disgust with your commitment to God, aggravated by your praise, annoyed by your worship and tired of your consistency with God.

Thirdly:

### **MARY MADE A CONSCIOUS DECISION TO FOCUS ON JESUS**

In the story, Jesus shows up at the house. Jesus is speaking and Mary chose to fix her eyes on Jesus. In this hurried topsy turvy world, we need to create moments in our lives when we deliberately sit still and listen to the voice of God. There are times when we need to shut the phone off, turn off the television, lock your doors and spend time with your God. God will not shout over your busy schedule. When God speaks, according to 1 Kings 19, it's not always through the wind, when God speaks it's not always through the earthquake, when God speaks it's not always through the fire. Because God often speaks through the still small voice. Sit down and pay attention to God.

How do we pay attention or focus on God? Here are five quick suggestions:

**a) BEGIN THE DAY WITH GOD**

I know it sounds simple enough but if we are going to stay focused on God, we have got to include the things of God in our daily lives. You've probably heard that when something is repeated twice in the Bible it is something to pay attention to. How about something that is repeated 10 times in one teaching? That is how many times Jesus used the word "abide" or "remain" in John 15:1-11.

Jesus said in John 15:4, "Abide in me." He repeated that in 2 other ways in John 15:5-7 while also providing a stark warning and a vast promise: "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

Staying focused on God requires abiding in Him. I know your mornings are rushed, but if you create the discipline to spend the first minutes of your day reading the word of God and talking to Him about the day ahead, you will have a greater focus on Him throughout the day.

**b) REMAIN IN PRAYER**

Do you want to create and develop the habit of a prayerful life? 1 Thessalonians 5:17 makes one simple yet bold command: "**pray without ceasing.**" This is a habit worth developing and is not as difficult as you might think. Plus, prayer has a way of changing lives. When you see or hear a news report that bothers you, pray for the people and the situation. Whenever you come across persons that annoy you or try your patience silently pray for them. When you hear of someone facing some problem, large or small...pray for them.

God does not need your eloquent, long-winded pious sounding discourses, laced with spiritual jargon and emotion teasers. He wants your heart, and often in prayer that sounds as simple as "*God, please help me!*"

**c) LIMIT THE DISTRACTIONS**

We must keep a clear space between us and God. You cannot keep your eyes on what you cannot see, physically or spiritually. In Joshua 3:4, the people of Israel are commanded to keep

2,000 cubits between them and the Ark of the Covenant. That is about a half of a mile and the purpose was so the people of Israel would always be able to see the ark in all types of terrain that they were travelling through. In our spiritual lives, when we fill the spaces with all kinds of conveniences and distractions, it becomes very difficult and even impossible sometimes to see where the Lord is leading us. We can overcome this by limiting the distractions, the busyness and our own lack of discipline by making a conscious effort to keep our Lord in the number one spot in our lives.

**d) SERVE THE LORD**

In Matthew 6:24, Jesus teaches, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” Though “mammon” was a word that primarily represented money and possessions, it was also used to refer to lusts of all types. If you are serving God with your resources of time, energy, talents, and with your money, then staying focused on God will naturally follow.

**e) REMOVE SIN FROM YOUR LIFE**

This could have been the first point in the list. What is meant by this is to remove the habitual, continuous sinful habits and patterns from your life. Hebrews 12:1 says, “Since we are surrounded by so many examples of faith, we must get rid of everything that slows us down, especially sin that distracts us.” If there is something, someone, some place, or anything in your life that leads you away from God in any way, or that keeps you out of prayer, away from fellowship with other believers or distracts you from reading your Bible, you have one option: remove that thing from your life.

Staying focused on God or growing in your spiritual, prayer, or Christian life in any way with any habitual sin in your life is next to impossible. Kill the sin or it will kill you spiritually, physically, or both.

Remember Jesus is in your house, he wants to be your host.

## **EMBRACING THE MYSTERY: GOD'S MISSION FIELD – PART 4**

### **TOPIC: JESUS IN THE MARKETPLACE**

#### **TEXT: MATTHEW 20:1-8**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The future of the church will be decided by how effectively the people of God are equipped and supported to live out their faith in the world. Jesus uses a term that stays with me in Matthew 20 and verse 3, “And going out the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace.” **Standing idle in the marketplace!**

The marketplace may not just be the places where goods and services are traded for money. The marketplace may be anywhere you find people. Jesus went to where the people were. Jesus did not come to minister to the well and the righteous, but to the average person. Jesus showed compassion on everybody, with no distinctions. At midday, Jesus sat down to rest by a well. There are many wells in a city – the place where people came to drink. The woman, whom Jesus asked for water, did not come looking for Him. He came to where she was and engaged her there. The Samaritans were looked down upon by the Israelites, but not by Jesus. He just sees people who need a Saviour.

The picture painted by Jesus in the text is that the landowner had an inexhaustible supply of work for those who wanted to work. The impression is that the landowner was surprised to find people **idle**, because he had plenty of work to give them. We need a marketplace theology that will drive us beyond the four walls of our sanctified buildings because there is so much to be done.

Local churches have a crucial role to play in equipping and supporting their members for this missionary encounter. No believer should fit the profile of an idler in the marketplace. This vision of growing the kingdom of God in the world is larger than just growing a local congregation. It should be our conviction that growing congregations alone is not a big enough vision to facilitate effective ministry in the world. To change our focus to pursue this larger vision toward an emphasis on weekday marketplace mission, beyond just Sunday gathering, will require at least three things:

- a) **A significant change in our priorities**

**b) The allocation of our resources**

**c) Becoming more marketplace friendly**

What is needed is a change of expectations that is potentially freeing for both leaders and church members, if ministry is better shared and expanded to include the whole of our life in the world as well as in the church. We find ourselves excited by this vision but are still groping to define clearly what this means and might involve. Let us look closer at these three areas:

**A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN OUR PRIORITIES**

In the text, it seems to me that there were workers with gifts and talents and abilities and resources. At different hours of the day the landowner went out still found labourers standing as idlers, doing nothing. It's one thing to go in the streets and find idlers, but it is another thing to look within the kingdom and find idlers. Even though they fit the profile of an idler, the landowner did not subscribe to that profile. He sent them out to be of value and of worth within his vineyard. The landowner created a significant change in the priorities of these so-called idlers.

We often find that the growth of the local church is measured by Sunday attendances as opposed to having a wider kingdom perspective whereby the results/fruit may not be seen in the local church. There is a need for a shift or a change in a congregation that has become Sunday-centric, that is, most of the resources, focus and energy channelled to making the Sunday service a success to the detriment of ministry on the other six days of the week. Usually, only ministries that function within the church and among church members are recognised and prayed for in our church services. Our priorities will always be wrong if our focus is not on the entire vineyard.

Not only do we become Sunday-centric but as the body of Christ we are sometimes church-centric. Busy in the church with rituals and routine but idle in the marketplace. So, there's a need to be transitioned from being church-centric to community-centric. Serving God must involve serving the community. Did you know that the church was originally granted tax exempt status because it was so involved in the social life of communities that it was saving communities an enormous amount of money through the redeeming nature of its work with individuals and neighbourhoods?

The community ought to become the church's main cause and focus. At His ascension, Jesus told the church to affect Jerusalem before going to Judea and Samaria in Acts 1:8. Nothing is wrong with focusing on Judea and Samaria but if our Jerusalem is neglected, our contextual impact will be minimized. Have we become idlers in the marketplace with constantly neglecting our Jerusalem – our unsaved spouses, our un-evangelized children, our neighbours and friends? Have we become idlers around them with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do we prefer to sign up for Judea and Samaria because we are known by our Jerusalem marketplaces?

### **A PROPER ALLOCATION OF OUR RESOURCES**

The landowner's observation of the idling posture drove him to assist the labourer with a proper allocation of his resources. Every single person within the body of Christ is gifted to do something. We all have natural and spiritual gifts. When our burden is for the marketplace, we will learn how to recognize, celebrate, and serve the various jurisdictions of society. This is how the church becomes place and space of influence. If church seeks influence with the local police, serve them. If the church seeks influence in local community government, then make yourself available to them. If you want to make a dent into crime and violence, find the community unattached, marginalized, those on the periphery, males and females too, foster relationships with them.

We can be seen as idlers in the marketplace when we give the hungry a bible without bread. We can be seen as idlers in the marketplace when we spend more on building and maintaining fancy facilities and sponsoring programs at the expense of meeting some obvious needs such as hunger and poverty. We can be seen as idlers in the marketplace when young people drop out of school and there's no response from the church. We can be seen as idlers when our evangelistic strategies become dormant or non-existent. We can be seen as idlers when a pandemic locks a church down and that said church gets comfortable in lockdown mode even after restrictions have been lifted. Let us see how best we can allocate our resources in the communities we serve.

### **BECOMING MORE MARKETPLACE FRIENDLY**

In verse 7, an interesting response was given to the Landowner by another set of labourers. The response is this: "No one hired us." What a sad response? Could this be saying that no one saw this group of labourers as having something to contribute? Is it that this group has lost its impact

on the workforce? What a sad place to be? Again, the Landowner did not subscribe to this self-defeating, navel-gazing response. The Landowner quickly commissioned them to work in the vineyard. This response by the Landowner is saying no one is with excuse and even if there is an excuse, no excuse is plausible enough.

Even if a church has accepted the lies of the enemy that “no one wants to hire us,” The Sovereign landowner in Christ has overruled such lies. The church should never reach a place where she believes that no one is interested in her. We need to find more practical ways of becoming more marketplace friendly.

The misconception of believing that the church has become irrelevant has created a divide between the sacred and the secular. There ought to be an emphasis on ministry in the whole of life through a missionary model, reaching out to the world, rather than attraction model, bringing people into the church. We need to consider adopting a model and a vision of church that seeks to ‘disciple and release’ rather than ‘convert and retain’. The appropriate analogy for the church is a fish hatchery, not an aquarium. We are Fishers of men, women, boys and girls.

Our responsibilities should be reconfigured to express the priority of equipping and supporting people for life in the marketplace. The focus on ministry in the whole of life should be taught even at Sunday School level. Jesus, the model Landowner, overruled every excuse that would warrant idleness in the marketplace. Within the kingdom, there is absolutely no place or space for idlers. The marketplace is buzzing with ministry opportunities, let us never waste the opportunities but seize them in Jesus Name. Amen.