

Sermon for Sunday 14 June 2026

Revd Elke Cattermole, Assistant Priest

Exodus 19.2-8a; Psalm 100; Romans 5.1-8; Matthew 9.35-10.8

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Please be seated.

As I was preparing for this sermon, I was thinking often we look at one particular reading, but today I actually decided during the week that I'm going to do all three and I'm going to mention all three, which sometimes we would have been taught not to do that, so hopefully it will come across okay. Because today's readings bring together two great truths of the Christian faith: God's grace towards us and God's commission for us. Before God sends, God saves, and before God commands, God loves, and before God asks anything of us, God gives himself to us. The readings from Exodus, Romans, and Matthew reveal a consistent pattern throughout Scripture. God calls a people to himself in grace, in love, and then sends them in the world as instruments of his blessing.

In our reading from Exodus, the Israelites have arrived at Mount Sinai. They have been rescued from slavery in Egypt. And notice that God does not begin by giving commandments—that comes later. He begins by reminding them of grace, his love for them. Through Moses, God says, 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.' He saved them. What a beautiful image. God did not simply bring Israel out of Egypt, he brought them to himself.

The goal of salvation is that relationship with God. God reminds them that their identity is founded not on what they have done, but on what he has done for them. They were slaves, helpless and oppressed. God acted in mercy and power. He rescued them, carried them, and made them his own. And then comes the commission. Their calling is not merely to enjoy God's blessing, but to reflect God's character to the world, helping people encounter the living God. Israel was called to be a witness among the nations. And that order is important. Grace comes first, mission follows on. God's people were not chosen because they were special. They became special because God had chosen them. Their vocation flows from grace.

Paul, after his conversion, reminds us in many of his letters, or epistles, to the early church of this. We see the same pattern appear in Paul's letter today to the Romans. Paul speaks of the greatest gift God has given, justification or confirmation through the love of Jesus Christ. And has quoted therefore, 'Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Peace with God is not merely a feeling, it is a new reality for us. The barrier of sin

has been removed. The hostility between humanity and God has been overcome through Christ's sacrifice in his death and resurrection.

Paul reminds us that this salvation is entirely an act of grace, of God's love. As human beings, we do not, or cannot, earn it. Because we think we are strong and righteous or deserving, we think it is our right. But in fact, Paul says that Christ died for us while we were weak, ungodly, and still sinners. This is one of the most astonishing declarations in the New Testament; God did not wait until humanity improved itself, because we never can. Christ did not die for good people, he died for sinners, which actually incorporates all of us. And Paul writes, 'God proves his love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' The cross that Jesus Christ died on is the ultimate revelation of God's heart.

When we wonder whether God loves us, we look not at our own circumstances but at Calvary, and there we see the length and breadth of divine love. This grace gives us confidence and hope. Paul's writing can be quite difficult to understand at times, especially when he says that we can even boast in our suffering because suffering produces endurance, character, and hope. We know it can, but it's difficult to actually say, 'Well, I've really suffered, so I can say all these things.' As Christians, we are not promised an easy path, but they are promised that God is at work in every circumstance. God is standing there with us.

Often when I have gone to see my spiritual director, he will say—and I would discuss different things—and he will say to me, 'Where is God in all this?' It always reminds me that the foundation of our Christian lives is not just our faithfulness to God, but God's faithfulness to us first. Having heard about God's grace in Exodus and Romans, we turn to the Gospel and discover God's commission, command or charge and instruction for us. Matthew tells us that Jesus went through the towns and villages teaching and proclaiming the good news and healing every disease and sickness. Then comes a deeply moving moment. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed, stressed, and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. They appeared leaderless, something that often concerns us today.

The mission of Jesus begins with compassion. He does not look at the crowds with annoyance, judgement, or indifference. He sees their suffering and is moved in the depths of his being. The world Jesus saw is not very different from our world today. Many people are anxious, lonely, confused, and searching for meaning. Many carry burdens that no one else can see. They keep them hidden. Many feel lost, wandering, and purposeless. But Jesus still looks upon this troubled world with compassion.

He then tells his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.' Notice that the problem is not the harvest. God is already at work in the world. The challenge is finding people

willing to participate in that work. So Jesus first tells the disciples to pray for labourers, then almost immediately he makes them the answer to their own prayer. He calls the twelve apostles and sends them out. 'Go and proclaim the good news. The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Jesus moves his disciples from being observers to become active participants in his ministry. The disciples are commissioned to continue in the ministry of Jesus. They are to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons, and announce God's kingdom. Most importantly, they are to give freely because they have freely received.

And that principle remains at the heart of Christian mission today. We cannot give what we have not received, but once we have received God's grace, his love, we are called to share it. The church exists because God's grace creates a people and God's commission sends those people into the world. That's us.

Over the last few weeks, people have come forward to become members of the PCC, lead in children's work, and last Thursday there was the visitation of the Archdeacon, at Rougham St Mary, a service for the admission of churchwardens. For us here at Lavenham and Preston St Mary, Graham Patrick, Ashley Jones, and Keith Davis were admitted as churchwardens. Through the grace of God and their commission, they have gone forward for work for God's Kingdom. And in less than two weeks, Margaret Mowbray will be ordained deacon. And we know that over the last year, Carol has been licenced as a reader, and people have joined the choir here at Lavenham and the pop-up choir at Preston St Mary. And there are many, many gifts that people here have given.

These readings read to us this morning challenge us to ask ourselves two questions. First, have we truly received God's grace, his love, in the way he wants us to? Many Christians live as though God's love must be earned. We carry guilt, fear, and anxiety, wondering whether we are good enough. We all too often are being brought up to think that we have to earn everything we need. How can we work harder? What can we do? How can we receive God's grace? And yet the Gospel quite clearly tells us that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Salvation begins with God's initiative, not ours. We are carried on an eagle's wings We are justified by faith and we are loved beyond measure.

And second, how are we responding to God's commission? Not everyone is called to be a missionary overseas or a lay or ordained minister, but every Christian is called to participate in God's commission. It will be different for each of us. And as we grow older, we may be called to do different things.

Some do so through prayer, some through acts of service, and some through generosity. Some through sharing their faith with neighbours, friends, and family, and some through caring for the

lonely, welcoming the stranger, or supporting those in need. Mission begins wherever we are. The people around us may not appear harassed, stressed, and helpless on the surface, but many are searching for hope, for a new life.

God places us in workplaces, schools, homes and communities so that we may bear witness to Christ. The church is not merely a gathering of people who have been saved. It is a community that has been sent, or even commissioned, for different roles. The good news of today's readings is that God's commission is always grounded in God's grace. We do not serve to earn God's love. We serve because we already received it. We do not go alone. The God who carried Israel, the Christ who died for sinners, and the Spirit who empowered the apostles goes with us still.

And may we hear again God's gracious call for us. May we rest in the peace won for us through Christ. And may we answer God's commission with faithful and joyful hearts, proclaiming by word and deed, bring help, healing, and hope, justice and peace to others, so that others too may discover the love of God put into their hearts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.