

Good morning. I'm really glad to see you here today. I'm glad that we can join together, as Christians in this district, to worship God together.

This morning, I'm going to be sharing a bit from my heart, and sharing a lot from God's word. And God's word, I often find very confronting. It challenges me. It challenges me about choices I've made. It challenges me about priorities that I've made in my life. It challenges me about the things of eternal significance, that I've neglected. It's pretty often that, when I hear the word of God, this double-edged sword of the Spirit, cuts right to the heart of the matter, as I begin to see things the way that God sees them, and I know that "Hey, there's big changes I have to make in my life" – changes that always cost me – but are good for me.

And, for most of us this morning, I suspect that God's word is going to be pretty challenging.

But firstly, a bit of sharing.

I've been in St George now for over 8 years. 7½ of those years, I spent as a minister in one of the churches here. My job, was to pastor the church, to preach and teach – to lead in discipleship. I failed. And I'm not going to ask you to list all my failures, because it'll take too long, and it'll probably knock me about too much. But I just want to share with you, 3 things I've failed at.

1. Firstly. When I first came here, I said that my aim was to make myself redundant. “If within a few years, the church was thoroughly equipped for ministry, I would have done my work, they wouldn’t need me any more.” But I failed.... It seemed the longer I stayed, the more dependant the church became upon me... And that’s often the way it is. We reckon that as long as we have a captain in the ship, we’re right....
2. The second thing I failed in, was helping a church to hear God, and follow Him. On two separate occasions, (June 2011 and June 2012), I believe the Lord was leading the Christian church of St George, to leave behind denominational identity that serves to separate, rather than unify, and to come together, as a reconciling community of Christ. I believe God was calling us to put aside our pride, suspicions of one another and to put aside our divisions that, if we’re honest with ourselves, are really based more so on personalities and histories of hurt, than they are on what we believe about Jesus Christ..... And twice I failed in that.
3. The third thing I failed in, was to engage a whole church in mission – to see the world as Jesus sees the world and to be so moved by the compassion of Jesus Christ, that we just simply are **compelled** to mission – right where we are. And I believe I failed to move a church to mission, because I failed to model it myself. To me, my

life-style and family time were more important than lost sheep. My fear of telling the world about Jesus, overrode the command of Jesus to do it. Basically, I was more focused on today than on eternity. I failed.

Well, Bush Disciples has begun. Once again my aim is to become redundant and I think I'm still failing dismally at that. I don't know what God's doing about bringing churches together in St George any more... He's already said it twice, and I'm just feeling more barriers going up....

But there is hope for mission. And today's reading, is about mission.

Matthew 9:35-10:42

A modern-day parable is told of a life-saving station on a dangerous coastline, where shipwrecks often occurred. The building was just a hut, there was just one row boat, and a few devoted members who kept a constant watch over the sea. They went out day and night, tirelessly searching for the lost.

As people were saved, they wanted to support this station, and they gave their time and money to support its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Some of the members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so small and so poorly equipped. They

felt that a more comfortable place should be provided for those who were being saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members.

They furnished it beautifully and they started holding all sorts of events there. And it became sort of a club.

Fewer members were now interested in going to sea themselves, so they hired professionals. Professional lifeboat crews were specially trained to save lives.

About that time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. They were dirty, injured and bleeding. They cried and shivered and dripped all over the place. The lifesaving club was in chaos. What were they to do with these people? So the property committee of the lifesaving station called an emergency meeting and decided to build a shower block outside the club where victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up and properly instructed regarding the rules of the lifesaving station.

At the next meeting, there was angst in the club's membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities because they were unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Other members, however, insisted that lifesaving was the primary purpose of the club.

They pointed out that they were still called a "lifesaving station." But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives, then they could start their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new lifesaving station experienced the same changes that had occurred with the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that coastline today, you will find a number of beautiful clubs along that shore.

Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.ⁱ

I'm going to be brutally honest, and say that "Most Christians who are looking for a church, are actually looking for a club." And I can say that, because I can see it in myself. We look for a nice atmosphere. We look for friendly people – even better if they're much like ourselves... We look for fun activities and a pleasant speaker to listen to (preferably for a short time). Quality music is a big thing. ... That's a generalisation, but I think it's a fair one.

With Bush Disciples, we've started mission into the bush. The most visible presence we have, is the gatherings we hold on Sundays, to hear God's word, pray and praise.

Last Sunday was a big day. 9am at Westmar. 2:30pm at Bollon. 6pm at Dirranbandi. By half-way through the day, I'd already made the decision "Not again". I've got a few people giving wonderful support at Westmar. I've got a couple of people giving wonderful support at Bollon... But I was having to cut fellowship short to get to the next spot. And I knew that at Dirran, I'd have no help setting up, or with the music.... And as I drove between Bollon and Dirran, I thought "I'm just going to have to tell the people that I'm just going to have to drop Dirran after this Sunday. I'm going to burn out – I just can't keep it up.

But when, at 6pm, the people rolled in, some of them the most unlikely looking candidates, who responded because of the flyer that went out, I took one look at the people who had gathered, and my heart was filled with compassion. And I just knew we couldn't stop. What we were doing, meant a lot to these people. And I knew, I don't need to give up. I need help.

³⁶ When (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

And I had begun to see people the way that **Jesus** sees them. In this community, and out there in the bush, there are people who are lost and helpless – They are like sheep without a shepherd, needing to be led to Jesus. Some know a little bit about Jesus. Most are very far from Him. But these are the

very crowds that move Jesus to compassion. And I've been moved to compassion too.

When you realise that, without Jesus, these people are lost, you can't help but be moved with compassion for them...

It was Jesus said, **"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.**

And for me, last Sunday, that rang oh so true... The harvest is plentiful. Way too often, we say "The harvest is sparse. It's not worth putting effort in here". But Jesus says "The harvest is plentiful"... Who's got it wrong? Us or Jesus? Is the harvest sparse, or is the harvest plentiful???? Which is it?

Well, if Jesus said "The harvest is plentiful", then plentiful the harvest is. But why can't we see the fruit of that? Why does the harvest seem so meagre? What's missing? I'll tell you what's missing – "Workers". And Jesus' solution is prayer. See the need, be moved with compassion, and pray. ³⁸ **Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."**

Late last year, I carted onions from Blenheim farm to the MoonRocks packing shed. And as harvest ramped up, they'd see the need, they'd make the decision, "We need more onion pickers." They'd make the request for more pickers, and more pickers would turn up, until those fields were covered with

pickers, harvesting the crop that was plentiful and ripe. All they had to do was see the need, and ask...

Are we doing that? Can you see the need for God's mission in your local community? Can you see it? Are you moved with compassion for those who are lost? Does it make you grieve that people who God loves, are on the highway to hell because they don't know any better? Can you see it? Does it matter to you?.....

Can you see that we need more workers in the harvest field?

You who are farmers know about harvesting. If your cotton crop is bigger than normal, you prepare for it. You either get another picker, or you get a contractor in. When the crop's ready for harvest, you can't leave it there. When the wheat crop is plentiful, when you need another header, you ask for one. You plan for it.

Why are we, who are so wise with things of business and financial import, so tardy when it comes to the harvest of souls? I'll tell you why. It's because we're not moved by compassion.... See people the way Jesus sees them, and the harvest will become urgent.

I've started praying "Lord, please send workers out into your harvest field". There's a few, but this district needs many more. There's a few, but I know some have grown tired and feel alone.... The saddest thing that I've discovered in the last

few weeks, is that in some places, Christians have given up. The harvest has been meagre. We're tired. We've given up. Don't bother with our district....

Will you pray with me? Will you pray that The Lord will send His workers out into the harvest field???? Will you commit to that?

Good. Because you're the answer to the prayer.

We Christians have become like that lifesaving station who want to pay professionals to do God's work for Him. It's not a big deal for me to ask of you to pray that the Lord would send out workers into His harvest field is it? I mean, most of us probably take the view, "Hey, we're a town short of ministers, all we need is a few more, fill a few holes, and they can get on with the mission again..."

BZZZ Wrong answer...

I hope you realise that when the New Testament was written, they didn't put in chapter and verse numbers and the passage headings that tend to split up our bibles... What is meant to be read together, we tend to separate.... The Bible that I usually use NIV, actually makes a big mistake by leaving out one word "and". The first word of Matthew chapter 10 is "And". In the Greek, there's a word "kai", which joins sentences together.

And of course, proper English never starts a sentence with “and”. And so it’s been dropped. But this is how it actually goes:

Jesus says “Pray that the Lord will send labourers out into the field” AND “You’re it.” (that’s a summary)

Pray for more labourers, **and** I’m commissioning you as labourers.

Pray for more harvesters, **and** I’m sending you out as harvesters.....

Woho. You agreed with me that you were going to pray for more harvesters. Well, we’ve got the answer to that prayer, right here in this room. Pray for more labourers And Jesus is sending you out as labourers....

That was a bit tricky wasn’t it? You see, we’re all called to pray for missionaries, and we’re all called to be on mission ourselves.

“Oh, but Michael, that’s not my gift...” Really??? As disciples, we are commanded to go and be witnesses to Christ – that’s all of us. Only **you** can be a witness as to what Jesus has done in your life. Only you can be a witness to the hope that you have in Jesus. It doesn’t say that everybody has to be a preacher. It doesn’t say that everybody has to be gifted in evangelism... But all disciples of Jesus **must** be witnesses. If all you know about Jesus is that you love Him, well that’s all you have to share. But share it.

Jesus said,

³¹ Fear not, therefore (most of us are pretty scared of being witnesses, but we don't have to be scared, because you are precious to Jesus, and He's going to look after you) and He continues... **³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men** (that's witnessing, folks), **I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven** (that's reward), **³³ but whoever denies me before men** (that's piking out), **I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.**

So, the question is, “Am I an acknowledger of Jesus, or am I a denier?” There's no middle ground. We either witness to what we **do** know about Jesus, or we don't... Be witnesses.

So, just a few words on mission, and we don't have time to cover it in depth today:

1. Firstly, **Mission is crucial**. A church, not involved in mission, is a club. Mission needs to be modelled by leaders (That's where I've failed God). But Mission is crucial for **all** disciples.
2. Secondly, **Mission is shared**. Michael Green says, “*One of the main reasons for burnout in Christian ministry is that it is generally carried out solo. Jesus never envisaged such a*

thing. Leadership in the New Testament is almost always plural.

There's something wonderful about going out on mission, together. You can pray together before you go. You can encourage one another along the way. You can encourage one another in your gifts, and help each other to discover how God might be able to use you better. You can support one another. And together, you can pray for the people you've just been witnesses to.

Mission is shared. I need to learn that.

3. Thirdly, **Mission is sustained**. Disciples are called to a life of mission – not just a couple of days a year – not just a one-off mission trip somewhere far away. Mission will include these things, but disciples are called to a life of mission.

4. Fourthly, **Mission is multi-faceted**. It involves witnessing, sharing the word of God, caring, healing, bringing spiritual freedom.

5. Fifthly, **Mission is strategic**. When Jesus gave this particular mission command to His disciples, the time wasn't right for them to go to the gentiles. But that came later. And we need to be open to where God is calling us to be witnesses at a given point in time. It might be right to be doing mission in this particular area at the moment, but not in that area.

6. Sixthly, **Mission is demanding**. It will cost. It will cost you financially. It will cost you physically. There is a time cost. There is an image cost. There is a commitment cost. Discipleship is not the easy road. But it is very rewarding.

7. Finally, **Mission is all about Jesus**. Jesus cares. Therefore we care. Jesus bore the cost of His mission. Therefore we do too. The message that we have to give, is that the Kingdom of heaven is near. What that's really saying, is "Jesus is near." Jesus came as your saviour. Jesus is coming as your judge. Jesus came to heal, and we heal in Jesus' name.

Mission is all about Jesus - even down to the point, that when we go out, we are sent out by Jesus, we go out in the name of Jesus, and through His Holy Spirit, we go, equipped by Jesus.

Mission... Hmmmm. Is there anyone left here? Or has everybody run away scared????

If you've come to Bush Disciples, hoping to find a place where you can just sit back, put your feet up, and have church done to you, you're in the wrong spot.

But if you've come to Bush Disciples, with a desire for honest teaching on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, well I am obligated to tell you, that discipleship **must** include mission. Folks, our mission field is right here. Right here in

this town. Right here in this district. Jesus says, “Give it a go”. Well, I’m giving it a go. Will you give it a go with me?

I’m not asking you to make out that you’re a super-apostle, getting to every single person in the district. I’m not asking you to go and preach great long theological treatise on salvation. And I’m not asking you to do it alone. What I am asking, is to make a start. Give it a go. If you don’t get anywhere, Jesus said, “If a town doesn’t listen to you, shake the dust off your feet as you leave, and **go to the next one.**” But I’m not going to shake the dust off my feet, until I’ve given it a jolly good go first.

How do we do it? Well, Mission begins at home. Be witnesses in your own community. Intentionally go and visit your neighbours. And don’t just stick to your circle of friends. Jesus **sent** the disciples **out** and He sends us out too.

Secondly, I’m asking you to get involved, not just in your own district, but to choose **one** other spot where we’re ministering, and put some time in there. The biggest needs as I can see it, Thallon, Westmar, Bollon, Dirranbandi, are all very small gatherings. I’m asking you to make a commitment to go to **one** other district, to attend a monthly Bush Disciples service, to help bolster the numbers a bit, and to be there to be witnesses for Christ. You would be amazed at the difference it makes to these people, just to have others present. All you have to do, is to turn up, and worship God together with the

locals. And have smoko with them and talk with them afterwards. Fellowship of Christians is powerful.

Thirdly, When you know what district you're going to make a commitment to, I'm asking you to give God one day a month, to visit in that area, and be witnesses for Christ. We'll organise it that you're not going on your own, and that you take a very simple message with you. "I know Jesus. I love Him, and He's told me to tell this district that His kingdom is near." That's all you need to say. If people display interest, you can share more. You can invite them along to the bush disciples service. If they're not interested, that's fine. You walk away and you visit somebody else.

I believe Jesus has a plan for country folk, to be witnesses to other country folk.

That's not too much to ask is it? To give God one day a month witnessing, and 1 service to support each month?

That's all I'm asking. What you do, well that's between you and God.

But I want you to know: I'm not sending you out alone. We need to do this together. Bush Disciples isn't just another service being provided. It's a call to a radical obedience to God's command of mission. And we're going to do it together...

I suspect that, about right now, there's a battle going on inside of you. It's a spiritual battle. It's a battle between the new man and the old man. The flesh is saying, "Leave that up to the others." You're already too busy. Don't kid yourself – **you're** not a missionary. The flesh is saying, "You've got other responsibilities – your business; your job; your church; your family..." The flesh is saying "No way."

But I also suspect the Spirit of God, is making your tummy churn in anticipation of what a community of mobilised Christians could do for the Gospel of Christ in this district. And the Spirit is wanting you to be a part of it.... Is that so???

I'm going to put you on the spot now: Is there anyone in this building, willing to be a labourer for Christ in His harvest fields?

God calls nobodies....

Is there anyone in this building, willing to be a labourer for Christ in His harvest fields?

I'm going to ask you to come and stand with me. And we're going to pray together.

ⁱ <http://dailywisdom.gospelcom.net/archives/old/1997/01/dw-01-06-97.html>