

Sermon - 5 Marks of Mission: ... and in our context?

Based on Luke 7.36-39, 44-50 and Acts 28.1-10

The Five Marks of Mission

- Over the last 6 Sundays we have been exploring the five characteristics, or marks, of missional church communities.
- These five marks can be conveniently memorised through five words, all beginning with T: tell, teach, tend, transform, and treasure.
 1. Tell: to proclaim the Good News of God's Kingdom
 2. Teach: to baptise and nurture new believers
 3. Tend: to respond to human need by loving service
 4. Transform: to change unjust structures in society
 5. Treasure: to safeguard the integrity of creation
- We've been doing this through the ABM's study guide for this year: *Where do we go from here?*
- The ABM - the Anglican Board of Mission here in Australia - have taken the 5 marks of mission of the worldwide Anglican Church, and reflected on them from the perspective of their projects in Australia, Papua New Guinea, and other neighbouring countries.
- In one sense we have finished looking at each of the marks - although they are definitely worth returning to frequently, as a reminder of what Christ has co-missioned us to participate in with him.

The sixth study: a fundamental aspect of Australian society now

- Nevertheless, there remains one final study in the booklet, entitled 'The hospitality of strangers', and it offers us an opportunity to engage with the reality of the Australian circumstances - the particular circumstances that make modern Australia 97% immigrants from the last 237 years, and 3% indigenous Australians from up to 65,000 years ago.
- And this seems particularly appropriate on the date that would have marked the end of NAIDOC week - although this too has been affected by COVID-19 and has been postponed to later this year.
- It is also appropriate in the light of the American-initiated protest *Black Lives Matter*, that has attracted both a lot of support and some very indignant criticism.

Jesus and two kinds of hospitality

- Firstly, we need to look at our Scripture readings, to ensure that our reflections are rooted in and aligned with God's Word, as best as we can.
- Our main reading describes the hospitality offered by the indigenous people of Malta, when Paul is shipwrecked there.
- But we start with the Gospel story, which describes how our Teacher, Jesus, responded to different kinds of hospitality shown to him.
- A Pharisee - a religious leader - called Simon invites Jesus to eat with him.
- As Jesus was reclining at the table a woman of known ill-repute shed tears over his feet, dried and anointed them with perfumed ointment.
- Simon the Pharisee is described as being very critical not only of the woman, but also of Jesus for accepting her scandalous ministrations.
- But Jesus then compares Simon's mean-hearted hospitality towards him as a guest, to the woman's open-hearted hospitality towards Jesus as a stranger in someone else's home.
- The comparison is striking.
- And Jesus makes the point that being mean-hearted works both ways: meanness in giving, results in being mean to receive, even when receiving God's love, compassion and mercy.
- Likewise being generous-hearted also works both ways: generosity of heart in giving, results in receiving generously, including being more open to receiving God's love, compassion and mercy.

Maltese hospitality

- It is this kind of generosity of hospitality that Paul and his travelling companions experience when they are shipwrecked on the island of Malta, south of Italy.
- The natives, or barbarians according to some translations, then offered them all - prisoners and guards and sailors alike - extraordinary hospitality.
- They took these shipwrecked people, who had nothing to offer - not only because some of them were prisoners, but because they had lost everything in the shipwreck - and made them welcome and at home in their midst.
- Paul is described as actively joining in, in accepting the welcome, collecting some wood and adding it to the fire.

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- And then a miracle, after having been bitten by a poisonous snake, because he survives without any of the expected ill effects.
- The hospitality and welcome is extended and deepened by the local elder, Publius.
- And Paul brings God's healing to Publius' father, and thereafter to other islanders.
- And then, when the crew, the guards and the prisoners get ready to continue on their journey to Rome, the islanders give them all the provisions they need.

Encounter between cultures

- What we are invited to reflect on in this story is the encounter between two cultures - between strangers who have arrived unexpectedly, and locals who have their own culture, their own beliefs, their own different way of viewing and engaging with the world.
- Where there could have been a clash, there was welcome.
- Where there could have been a patronising attitude on the part of the well-educated, well-travelled Paul, instead there was a quiet acceptance of the hospitality shown, and an offer to extend God's blessing of healing.
- We are invited to think about the different cultures that come to Australia - that have been coming to Australia for the last couple of hundred years - and how they engage with each other, both constructively and destructively - and the welcome that is or isn't offered, and that is or isn't accepted.
- But especially, we are invited to think about all the immigrant cultures who have been arriving over the last couple of hundred years, and the cultures of Australia's first peoples, who've been here for tens of thousands of years.
- The reality in Australia has been a clash between fundamentally different cultures that has been ongoing since we immigrants - because I include myself - first arrived here, and still continues today.
- This is why the *Black Lives Matter* protest - even though it started in the USA - has a resonance for many Aboriginal people today, as well as other people of colour.

The racism we are blind to

- Because there is a systemic racism in Australian society that most white Australians cannot see.
- And of course, as someone who became an Australian only ten years ago, other Australians take exception to me making this statement, not understanding that I'm actually in a better position to see it.
- You see, as someone who was born in South Africa while the racist system of Apartheid was still being constructed, and living through its height when the state church there theologically endorsed the intentional racial discrimination, and then through the years when Apartheid was systematically dismantled again - I can say that I know racism.
- The good thing about South African racism was that no-one was trying to hide it, no-one was trying to pretend that it didn't exist, no-one was in denial about it being intentionally enacted in law and enforced by the police, and the judiciary, and the army, and so many ordinary citizens.
- People were in denial about its morality, not recognising that it was immoral, and not wanting to call it racism, and in denial about other aspects of Apartheid.
- But no-one was in denial about the intentional separation of races, and the discrimination of facilities, whereby, for example, white people travelled in first class train carriages while black people were only permitted to travel in third class carriages.
- As someone brought up under Apartheid, I learnt to tell how white or how black someone was, and the degree to which they were one of a number of mixed race types.
- As I grew up, my Anglican faith taught me to reject this kind of discrimination, and to regard and treat all people as having the same worth and value as myself.
- But my national culture also taught me to notice and recognise not only racism, but all kinds of discrimination - against people from a different culture, different language, different education, different gender, different sexuality, different faith, different generation.
- I see it time and time again - Australians discriminating against each other because of unrecognised prejudice, including the prejudice of racism.
- I hear people insist that they are not racist, even while using derogatory language: "I'm not racist, but ..."

Solidarity with those who suffer systemic injustice

- The Anglican Church of Australia has a National Aboriginal Bishop, Bishop Chris McLeod - a person of Gurundji descent - who says: "*Black Lives Matter because we need to focus our thoughts and actions on those who suffer the most.*"
- Of course all injustices need to be addressed, regardless of who an injustice is perpetrated against.

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- However, when an indigenous adult is fifteen times more likely to end up in prison compared to a non-indigenous adult, then particular attention needs to be paid to our underlying social systems that produce such a significant bias.
- And we, as a church community, committed to following the way of Christ - the way of “Jesus, who showed [compassionate] solidarity with the poor, the outcast, the marginalised, and rejected” (Bishop Chris McLeod) are likewise called to show the same solidarity.
- And one of the key things we can do is to actively listen to the people who are hurting - listen, and acknowledge the reality of what they have experienced.
- If we can't do this, then - as we discovered at a different Royal Commission - we are like those priests and bishops, and parents and police, who responded to children who described being sexually abused, that they were lying or that they should keep quiet.
- In other words, when we try to shut people up when they need to tell of the injustice experienced, or we choose to disbelieve or ignore them, then we end up reinforcing the original injustice.
- Rather, we should be actively listening to them, and standing in solidarity with them.

Truth-telling for Victoria

- I am going to conclude with a good news story from yesterday.
- The Victorian Government is going to formally establish a truth-telling process to recognise and address historic wrongs and ongoing injustices against Indigenous Australians. (*Victoria to introduce Australia's first truth-telling process to address Indigenous injustices*, by Naveen Razik - July 11, 2020 - SBS News)
- This will be similar to Truth and Reconciliation processes used in post-Apartheid South Africa, in Canada, and in New Zealand, which have helped to heal deep divisions caused by historic human rights abuses.
- Geraldine Atkinson, the co-chair of the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria, said: "Truth-telling gives Victoria the opportunity to make the invisible visible and the pain of so many both heard and reconciled."
- Gabrielle Williams, the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Minister, said: "There is nothing more powerful than the truth, because with honesty comes healing."
- I think it's great that politicians are making these kinds of acknowledgments.
- This is exactly the kind of language the Church needs to be using.
- And when we have the humbleness to listen to and acknowledge the pain of historic and current injustices in our society, then reconciliation becomes possible.
- And when that happens, we might finally be able to be open-hearted enough to receive the kind of welcome that Paul experienced in Malta, and that Jesus acknowledged from the apparently unworthy woman.

May this be so, Lord. Amen.