

Sermon - Mission: 5 marks

Based on: Amos 7.7–17; Psalm 82; Colossians 1.1–14; and Luke 10.25–37

Last Sunday

- Last Sunday we looked firstly at what it means to be *called* to be disciples of Jesus: following his lead and learning from his teaching and behaviour.
- We looked at Jesus himself being an apostle - that is, being sent by our heavenly Father - and that, in following him, we too are *sent* - that we are part of a community that is likewise *called* to be *sent*.
- And thirdly we looked what we are sent to do: commissioned by Christ to join with him in his ongoing mission.

Types of mission

- Once Jesus had ascended to heaven, how has that mission taken place?
- We are given the first stories of the early church enacting mission in the Acts of the Apostles:
- from being empowered by the Holy Spirit, the church matured in faith and grew in numbers through this mission.
- Persecution drove the apostles out of Jerusalem, and they started witnessing to God's Kingdom more widely.
- While St Paul was only one of many apostles, his four missionary journeys described in Acts, along with some of his letters included in our Scriptures, meant that he has become a role-model for a particular aspect of mission - that of evangelist.
- The focus of an evangelist missionary is to introduce God to people, and invite them to be introduced to God - that is, to baptise them.
- While this certainly makes for exciting adventure stories, it is only one aspect of the mission of Christ.
- For myself, personally, I can look at the work undertaken by two missionaries in my own family.
- My grandfather was ordained and then sent first to East Africa, based in Zanzibar, and then to what is now Zimbabwe.
- As I understand it, he was not an evangelist missionary, but a missionary who would lead already established church communities, and nurture their communal faith to maturity to the point that they could send out missionaries or apostles from their own congregations.
- The other missionary was my mother-in-law, who after being trained, was sent by the church to undertake social work and education in Cape Town, South Africa.
- Two people intentionally trained as missionaries, yet fulfilling different aspects of the mission of Christ.

What is mission?

- So what is mission?
- How do we now understand the Great Commission in the light of the rest of the New Testament, and of two thousand years of experience of following and working with Jesus?
- One of the most helpful contemporary descriptions of mission is the Five Marks of Mission, as promoted by the worldwide Anglican Communion.
- Here at St John's, we have worked through these marks of mission recently: with a study booklet titled *Where do we go from here?*, and sermon series, that started on Pentecost Sunday in 2020, and again through this year's Lent course titled *Repairing the breach*, and the Lent sermon series.
- Here they are again:
 1. Proclaim the good news of the Kingdom.
 2. Teach, baptise, and nurture new believers.
 3. Respond to human need by loving service.
 4. Transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind, and pursue peace and reconciliation.
 5. Strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, sustain and renew the life of the earth.

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What about worship and admin?

- There are two particular aspects of the life of the church that these marks of mission do not cover, that I will mention briefly.
- The first is worship - that is the people of God gathering together to offer up praise and thanksgiving to God, and to realign ourselves with God's purpose and desire.
- Today's reading from the prophecy of Amos gives us the allegory of the plumb line, which is used in construction to make sure that walls and pillars are built in alignment with the centre of gravity.
- Regular and frequent participation in worship helps to make sure that we are in alignment with the divine centre, and helps us to fulfil the first and greatest commandment, to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind.
- Nevertheless, if that is all we focus on, then we are vulnerable to becoming like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan: too focused on our religion to truly follow the way of Jesus.
- So I suggest that the marks of mission are understood to function within the *context* of our worship of God.

- The other aspect that is not mentioned is management, or administration.
- Now no-one is likely to come to faith, or to grow in their faith, through effective management and administration: that is not missional in itself.
- However, poor management and a lack of good administration definitely handicaps the work of mission, while good management and administration facilitates mission.

#1 - Tell

- Now I'm going to take us through the five marks again.
- The first mark is to Proclaim the good news of the Kingdom.
- The Anglican Board of Mission - the ABM - have rewritten this as:
Witness to Christ's saving, forgiving and reconciling love for all people.
- That is, to share amongst ourselves and with others:
 - how Christ's love saves us from the hurt and brokenness of sin;
 - how Christ's love enables us to be forgiven, and encourages us to forgive others; and
 - how Christ's love enables us to be reconciled with God, and with each other.
- All of this is the Good News of God's kingdom on earth, and we are commissioned to share this through word, through deed, and through sacrament.
- Paul does this in today's New Testament reading when he writes:
You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you ... He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1.5-6, 13-14)
- Jesus witnesses to this more subtly when he responds to the lawyer with the parable about a Samaritan who is motivated by forgiveness and reconciliation to help a beaten up Jew, someone probably prejudiced against Samaritans.

#2 - Teach

- The second mark of mission is to Teach, baptise, and nurture new believers.
- Of course every church community should be attracting, inviting and encouraging people to join them.
- However, if a church focuses primarily on their numbers, then they will not maintain those numbers over the long term.
- ABM have helpfully rewritten the second mark as:
Build welcoming, transforming communities of faith.

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- This is what Paul talks about when he writes:
we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1.9–10)
- This is what Jesus touches on in his parable: the welcome or hospitality the Samaritan practices, enabling the life of the traveller to be transformed from brokenness to wholeness.

#3 - Tend

- The third mark is to Respond to human need by loving service,
- or as ABM has it:
Stand in solidarity with the poor and needy.
- As the psalmist writes in today's psalm:
Rescue the poor and needy: and save them from the hands of the wicked. (Psalm 82.4)
- And as disciples of Jesus we strive to follow his example of serving those in need.
- Too often people hold the poor and needy to account for their circumstances, and refuse to share blessings with them until they meet one condition or another.
- Jesus made no judgement or condemnation of those in need, but always responded with love as he was able to, in the moment.
- Indeed, this is the primary instruction from the parable of the Good Samaritan, where the Samaritan neither judged the traveller for being a Jew, nor condemned him for being foolish enough to travel alone where he would be vulnerable to being preyed upon.
- And Jesus tells all of us, as well as the lawyer, to act like that Samaritan.

#4 - Transform

- The fourth mark is to Transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind, and pursue peace and reconciliation.
- Again, ABM expresses the same thing in a slightly different way:
Challenge violence, injustice and oppression, and work for peace and reconciliation.
- This is exactly what Amos was doing when he challenged King Jeroboam of Israel, in spite of the priest Amaziah trying to stop Amos from speaking the word of the Lord.
- The psalmist likewise writes:
Judge for the poor and fatherless: vindicate the afflicted and oppressed. (Psalm 82.4)
- It doesn't matter which political party you vote for, nor which party occupies the seat of government at any point, part of the work of mission is to hold all leaders to account for any injustice, and to encourage any leader who promotes peace and reconciliation.
- Jesus also challenged injustice both directly and indirectly.
- In his parable, he described a priest and then a Levite avoiding the injured traveller: the priest and Levite were people responsible for facilitating and leading people in worship of God.
- Jesus was challenging those religious leaders who were not enacting God's kingdom, and part of our mission is to help transform systemic injustice not only in wider society, but within the Church as well.

#5 - Treasure

- The final mark of mission is to Strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, sustain and renew the life of the earth.
- Or, as ABM puts it:
Protect, care for and renew life on our planet.
- There is not much emphasis in the Bible on this aspect of mission.

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- This is not surprising given that by the time of the Reformation in 1500 AD the world's human population was still under half a billion - and was not impacting on creation at the rate and magnitude it is today, as we reach 8 billion people this year.
- Nevertheless, we do recognise that just as part of the mission of the church is to stand up for the voiceless and make sure they are heard, so God's creation is often without a voice and unheard by those who exploit nature destructively, and by those who benefit materially from that exploitation.
- For the church to be truly missional, we need to engage intentionally with environmental injustice as much as we should do with social injustice.

Anticipating next Sunday

- So, having been reminded that Jesus calls us as disciples, and sends us as apostles to continue his mission in the world, we have now also been reminded of the five aspects of that mission.
- Over the next few Sundays we will explore which aspects we at St John's are currently enacting, and what we are planning to enact more intentionally, in line with Christ's mission.
- And as we do so, let us be mindful of the Scriptures that the lawyer quoted to Jesus.
- This is repeated in today's collect, with which I will now conclude.
- Let us pray:

Eternal God,
you have taught us through Christ
that love is the fulfilment of the law:
help us to love you with all our heart, with all our soul,
with all our mind, and with all our strength,
and our neighbour as ourself;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.