

## Sermon - Mission: currently at St John's

Based on: Hosea 1.2–10; and Ken Morgan's *Pathways: Local Mission for All Kinds of Churches*

### Previously ...

- Over the previous three Sundays we have been reminded that we are each *called* to be a disciple of Jesus, and then, like the apostles, *sent* - as a community - to continue the mission of Christ.
- We were reminded of the Five Marks, or characteristics, of that Mission:
  1. *Telling* the Good News;
  2. *Teaching* that Good News;
  3. being the Good News through *tending* to those in need;
  4. being the Good News through *transforming* situations of injustice and violence; and
  5. being the Good News through actively *treasuring* God's creation.
- Our primary context for the second half of the sermon series is the second Mark of Mission - that of teaching, baptising, and nurturing new believers.
- Last Sunday I highlighted the need for us here at St John's to be more intentional about enacting - as a community - this second Mark of Mission, to ensure that we are raising up the next generation of parishioners.
- I mentioned that our Mission Action Team has been able to discern a first few actions for our parish's Mission Action Plan, and I briefly touched on the bigger picture of a Mission Pathway - or what I think of as seven stepping stones - to enable people to walk across the metaphorical river from being unbelievers to becoming part of the next generation of parishioners here.
- Today we are going to look more closely at the Mission Pathway framework, and what we are currently doing at St John's and where these activities fit into the framework.

### Hosea and his 'wife of whoredom'

- Before doing that I want to look briefly at today's Old Testament reading from the prophecy of Hosea.
- We have heard quite a confronting description of Hosea being given a divine directive to marry an apparent prostitute, and then give some rather unhappy names to the children he has with her.
- On the face of it, it seems quite bizarre.
- However, the way to understand this is found in the divine directive itself:

*'Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.'* (Hosea 1.2)
- How can the land commit whoredom, that is, prostitute itself?
- This is simply a reference to God's people in that land who have not remained faithful to the Lord, but who have instead been unfaithful by turning to pagan gods.
- So while it is possible that Gomer, daughter of Diblaim, might have literally been a prostitute, it is more likely that she was a member of an Israelite family that turned from worshipping the Lord God almighty to worshipping the Philistine god Baal.
- In this way she would have been - in the context of this metaphor - a person 'of whoredom', and her children would have learnt their faith from her, and would thus in turn be 'children of whoredom'.
- Although we wouldn't want to apply that terminology to anyone today, the concept of people turning away from our Lord God to follow other gods remains true.

### Hosea's children

- What of Hosea's children and their names?
- *Jezreel* means 'God sows', and to start with is linked to God sowing destruction on Israel for being unfaithful.
- *Lo-ruhamah* means 'Not pitied', in that God will no longer have pity on Israel.
- *Lo-ammi* means 'Not my people', in that the Israelites had abandoned God's covenant with them.
- However, at the end of today's passage and further on in Hosea, in spite of the unhappy prophecy here, there is an acknowledgement that God's people will - in due time - have their relationship with the Lord restored.
- *Jezreel's* name, meaning 'God sows', will then be associated with God sowing new life.
- *Lo-ruhamah's* name will be changed to *Ruhamah*, indicating that God would once again have pity on his people.
- And *Lo-ammi's* name will be changed to *Ammi*, indicating that the Israelites would once again become God's people.
- In this way Hosea, as a prophet, was not only given God's word to speak, but was also directed to embody God's word in his personal relationships - even in his marriage and in his growing family.

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- Hosea and his family became a living sign of God's relationship with his people.
- In the same way, our church community has a prophetic role in the wider community.
- In our being called and sent by Jesus, we too are to be a living sign of God's relationship with all God's children.
- And it is this that should be part of our motivation to be missional, and - just as Hosea was tasked to be quite intentional in his actions - we are likewise tasked to be intentional in how we undertake mission.

### Pathway to belonging

- So I invite you to refer to the appendix below, and we'll look at what we are currently enacting in terms of the Second Mark of Mission, which is all about teaching, baptising and nurturing new believers.
- The schematic is taken directly from Ken Morgan's book titled *Pathways: Local Mission for All Kinds of Churches*.
- Ken Morgan was running the diocesan Parish Renewal Program, and he led our Mission Action Team through this.
- For now, we can think of each of the seven stages like seven stepping stones, taking someone from the wilderness side of the River Jordan, safely across the river to the Promised Land side.
- Today we are looking at what stepping stones we currently have in place at St John's.

### Stage 1 - Potential Contact

- The *Potential Contact* stage is focused on those people who are total strangers to us - we don't know them by name and we don't have their contact details.
- While there is a whole world of people who this applies to, what narrows this down is the word *potential*.
- And here at St John's we are richly blessed with an abundance of potential contacts.
- We have a large number of people who actually step onto our parish property every week:
  - the staff and families of our Kindergarten;
  - the guests and volunteers for the two community meals programs every Tuesday and Wednesday evening;
  - the eight different community service groups for AA, AI Anon, and NA.
- There are others who come onto our parish property: workers from Coles sometimes take a break on our steps, school students run around on our front lawn while waiting for lifts home, and we have a steady trickle of local residents who use the public right of way that we own from Ellesmere Avenue across our carpark to, and from, Croydon Centro.
- Potential contacts are also those who access the parish website and Facebook page.
- Bear in mind that while we want our online presence to work for people who are already believers, the focus here is on those people who are not yet believers.
- What activities do we have in place for any of these potential contacts to let them know that our church community exists, and that we are interested in something that might interest them?
- I suggest that we haven't really thought about this before with any defined sense of mission.

### Stage 2 - In Touch

- The *In Touch* stage is focused on those people who know at least one person in the church, and who in turn knows them.
- This is where there is the start of a relationship - or maybe where an existing relationship starts connecting specifically with someone as a church-goer.
- Our service booklets and welcome brochures help to address this need, but are not sufficient in themselves.
- Many of the requests from strangers that I attend to also fit into this category: being asked to baptise an infant, give last rites to a stranger in hospital, conduct a stranger's funeral, or even provide baptism details from church records.
- These are all activities where the vicar has the opportunity to establish a pastoral relationship with people who are not active believers.
- Nevertheless, Ken Morgan warns against the church community assuming that pastoral contact with the vicar alone provides an effective stepping stone, since such people might develop a relationship only with the vicar in the role of a pastoral chaplain, but not with the church community.
- Such contact can be effective in providing pastoral service, but is more often doesn't go anywhere with respect to mission.

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- What is required is the establishment of relationships that connect - that express the welcome, the love and the compassion of Jesus - so that they are open to the genuine invitation to belong to a group that's part of the church.

### Stage 3 - Belonging

- The third *Belonging* stage is focused on those people who know several people in the church and are a regular part of a church group.
- Such church groups might be a service group, a book club, a walking group, or a playgroup for pre-kinder infants with an opportunity for the adults to connect.
- The Tuesday night community meals organisation, The Dining Room Mission, is an example of such a service group.
- Bear in mind that there are different angles on the relationship between TDRM and St John's.
- The particular angle that fits here is having an activity group to belong to.
- This missional step is not about the guests - the guests are part of the dynamic of the Third Mark of Mission, that of tending to those in need.
- From the angle of the Second Mark of Mission which we are focused on here, it is the group of volunteers that we might invite people to join: 'Come and join the TDRM team,' or 'Come and join the St John's TDRM team'.
- This stage is about people, particularly unbelievers, belonging to a group that puts them among Christians - people who have an active faith relationship with God.
- It is the primary opportunity for Christians to share aspects about their faith - not in the way of overt proselytising, but sharing what is happening in their own life:
  - perhaps where the word of God has provided helpful insight into resolving a problem, or where God's peace has helped to calm some anxiety.
- This stepping stone of an activity group to belong to meets their need for an opportunity to find out more about the Christian faith, and a reason to consider commitment.

### Stage 4 - Embracing The Gospel

- The fourth stage of *Embracing The Gospel* describes people who are interested in knowing about Jesus.
- They need to hear the gospel and be invited to establish a relationship with God.
- This is where we need activities where people can explore the gospel in a meaningful way.
- This is not simply about hearing the gospel, but also exploring it - to be able to ask questions and engage in dialogue.
- And there needs to be opportunity for people to make a response to the claims of Jesus - hopefully a conversion of deciding to intentionally follow the way of Jesus in their life.
- This is what courses like Alpha, and Christianity Explained, and catechumenate courses are for.
- Here at St John's we haven't run such courses - yet.
- It needs a small team of people committed to undertaking this.
- We also need to have people who are ready to be invited to participate in it - usually people who are already at stages 2 and 3, those who are *In Touch* or who *Belong* to a church group.
- Actually existing church-goers or those who've dropped out of church previously can also benefit from participating in such courses.

### Stage 5 - Following Jesus

- The fifth stage of *Following Jesus* describes people who are in a process of learning, obeying and growing in faith - which hopefully includes all of us here.
- This is ideally a lifelong commitment to being formed to imitate Jesus in how he related to God and others.
- This is something for people to undertake both individually and within the community.
- It is usually not effective through only attending weekly church services since it is about - and I'm quoting Ken Morgan here - 'developing strong spiritual practices that transform their character; being connected in a listening community to support and challenge them; and being committed to being fruitful in their faith'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> p120, *Pathways: Local Mission for All Kinds of Churches*, by Ken Morgan (2017)

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- While our three weekly Eucharist services help with the learning aspect, this stage is best served by our annual Lent courses and by the Focus on Faith and Friendship Group.
- The Faith and Friendship Group meets weekly, and was initiated by the previous vicar here, the Rev'd Jan St James, in 2014.

### Stage 6 - Serving In Ministry

- The sixth stage is *Serving In Ministry*, and describes people who have identified gifts, skills and ministry, and are serving others in Jesus' name.
- There are many opportunities to do that here at St John's.
  - rostered church service support - for example arranging flowers, playing music, cleaning the church, serving refreshments, reading the lessons, and so on;
  - weekly aged care services;
  - Parish Council;
  - Mission Action Team;
  - Mission Business Plan Working Group;
  - Parish Network Team;
  - St John's TDRM team;
  - Supportive Friends group;
  - Kindergarten Committee; and
  - TDRM Committee.
- One of the key aspects that we don't do here yet is help people discern what their particular gifts and graces are, so that there is a good fit for a particular person in a particular role.

### Stage 7 - Leading Ministry

- The final stage of *Leading Ministry* describes people who take up a leadership role.
- Being a leader does not necessarily mean being a visible worship leader during our services.
- Someone who leads a team of readers rostered for the services is a good example.
- Also, there is a difference between management and leadership, so for example the duties of the Parish Council are primarily about responsible management.
- Here at St John's we undertook training in November last year for parishioners to lead Lent study groups, and they then did so in Lent earlier this year.

### Anticipating next Sunday

- Next Sunday we will have another look at the seven stages of the Mission Pathway, but from the perspective of our new Mission Action Plan.
- We will look at how we might establish stepping stones that are more effectively lined up with each other.
- For today we will end with a reminder from the prophecy of Hosea.
- Bernadette Farrell picked up on this when she wrote the hymn we have set for the gradual today:

*Word of God, renew your people,  
make us now your living sign.  
Recreate us for your purpose  
in this place and in this time.*

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### APPENDIX

<b>Stage</b>	<i>Description of people at this stage &amp; what they need</i>	<i>Aim of activity at this stage</i>	<i>Current activities in our parish (the stepping stones)</i>
<b>#1 Potential Contact</b>	People we don't know & who know no one in the church. They need someone to make contact with them.	Let people know we have something to offer. Encourage people to make initial contact with us.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- website &amp; Facebook</li> <li>- St John's Kindergarten</li> <li>- 2 community meals programs (eg TDRM)</li> <li>- 8 community service groups (AA, Al Anon, NA)</li> <li>- occasional concerts</li> </ul>
<b>#2 In Touch</b>	People who know at least one person in the church. They need an attractive group in which to belong.	Encourage people we know to become regular participants in a program or group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- welcome brochures &amp; service booklets</li> </ul>
<b>#3 Belonging</b>	Know several people and are a regular part of a church group. They need an opportunity to find out more about Christian faith and a reason to consider commitment.	Cultivate relationships between believers and people who participate in a program or group. Share spiritual life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ?</li> </ul>
<b>#4 Embracing The Gospel</b>	Interested in knowing about Jesus. They need to hear the gospel and establish a relationship with God.	Create an environment where people can explore the gospel in a meaningful way. Ensure there are opportunities for people to make a response to the claims of Jesus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ?</li> </ul>
<b>#5 Following Jesus</b>	In a process of learning, obeying & growing in faith. They need teaching, encouragement & accountability to support Christian life.	Teach, encourage & share accountability with people as they shape their life to be followers of Jesus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 weekly Eucharist services</li> <li>- Focus on Faith &amp; Friendship group</li> <li>- annual Lent course</li> </ul>
<b>#6 Serving In Ministry</b>	Have identified gifts, skills & ministry, & are serving others in Jesus' name. They need opportunities & training to develop gifts.	Encourage & equip all people to exercise their gifts & talents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- rostered church service support (eg flowers, music, cleaning, refreshments, readers, &amp; so on)</li> <li>- weekly aged care services</li> <li>- Parish Council</li> <li>- Mission Action Team</li> <li>- Mission Business Plan Working Group</li> <li>- Parish Network Team</li> <li>- St John's TDRM team</li> <li>- Supportive Friends group</li> <li>- Kindergarten Committee</li> <li>- TDRM Committee</li> </ul>
<b>#7 Leading Ministry</b>	Take up a leadership role. They need leadership mentoring.	Train & encourage people to be leaders in the church.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- study group leadership training</li> </ul>