

## Sermon on Mission – 18<sup>th</sup> November: St. John's and Christ the King

- In Shirley Parish we have reached Week 10 in our sermon series on the basics of Christianity
- Apart from the basics of Christian belief and living, there is no more important topic than Mission
- Mission is a word that's well known in the secular world – lots of organisations have mission statements to express what they are about.
- But mostly it is a Christian expression: OED 'The vocation or calling of a religious organisation, especially a Christian one, to go out into the world and spread its faith.'
- Often found on church websites. May be short straplines, Shirley Parish: 'Knowing Christ, making him known', St. Patrick's, 'Growing God's Kingdom'
- What I want to preach about is how our understanding of mission is rooted in Christ and the early church.
  
- In NT there are numerous stories about the apostles being sent to proclaim the gospel. An apostle is literally someone who is sent – it comes from the Greek *αποστέλλω*, which means I send.
- In the gospels there are stories of the Sending of the 12 & in Luke Sending of the 72,
- Mt's gospel ends with the great commission that we heard for our first reading and which I quoted at the beginning of this sermon, and there are similar stories of Jesus commissioning the apostles at the end of all the gospels. All slightly different, but plenty of common themes.
- Acts has stories such Acts 13 when the other leaders of the church in Antioch laid hands on Barnabas and Paul, who was still called Saul at that time, for a mission in Cyprus.
- In 2 Cor 5. Paul gives us a theology of mission, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.'
- We ourselves are not the message: but we are all ambassadors for Christ, people who speak and act on his behalf to make his message known in the world at large.
- Our service today will end with 'send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory and then the Dismissal: 'go in peace to love and serve the Lord'.

### Our Mission

- 3 aspects of Mission, all of which are rooted in Jesus, in what he said, in what he did and in what he created around him
- **Speaking:** What we say as Christians needs to be rooted in what Jesus said.
- We have plenty of evidence of what Jesus said: the four gospels are a record of at least some of what Jesus taught when he preached to the crowds and when he sat down with his disciples. He taught them about the kingdom of God (next week's topic) and his own role as Son of God.
- He taught them about the nature of God, that God is loving and caring and reaches out to people to forgive their sins and heal their illnesses.
- And he taught clear values about justice and honesty and compassion for the vulnerable and poor.
- Sometimes Jesus taught directly as in the Sermon on the Mount, sometimes he taught in parables, but he always taught about God.

- As the church we have a sacred duty to do the same, to speak the word of God to anyone who will listen, and to make use of any opportunities for Evangelism, the spreading the word of God, in season and out of season as St.Paul tells us.
  - Ranges right from our leaders who speak as the conscience of the nation to individual Christians explaining the faith to people who want to know more.
  - We should all be capable of giving an account of our faith , however simple, to someone who wants to know about Christianity.
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- **Second Doing:** What Jesus did: he brought healing, new life and hope to people, who were sick or in need
  - Sometimes his mighty works were individual healings: sometimes they were miracles for the masses: Feeding of the 5000
  - Christians should bring their compassion and spirituality to the work of health care and social care and aid for the poor.
  - Many hospitals and hospices have Christian origins and lively chaplaincy departments.
  - Churches often provide Social Care for those who are lonely, hungry, bereaved or recovering from addiction. Christians in this country run Food Banks and other Community projects, Justin Welby announced recently that 13,000 Church of England Churches are running 33,000 Social Action projects at the moment
  - The church also funds overseas aid and development. Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tear Fund are just three of the many Christian organisations bringing practical aid to those who need it most.
  - Food-packing organised by the charity 'Feed the hungry', gives churches hands on experience of packing meal parcels for the hungry – read about it
  - These are all examples of Christian Mission
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- **Third is Being.** Jesus created around him a community of believers.
  - As the Christian message spread new communities called churches were set up and grew.
  - This begins in the gospels, where we see Jesus creating an itinerant group of followers, men and women who were committed to him and to the work of the gospel
  - Luke 8, 'Jesus went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.'
  - Jesus's community of faith was radical and inclusive. It included women and people Jesus had healed.
  - Acts and Paul's letters testify to how the Christian missions set up churches, which were Christian communities, people committed to following Jesus's teaching and caring for each other
  - Our reading from Acts is part of the story of how the church became a racially inclusive church, this didn't happen without a struggle and profound disagreement, but Acts 15 shows how the church made the decision to be racially inclusive
  - Churches are communities of Christians in which all play their part in inward growth and outward mission: and which are inclusive of all sorts and conditions of humanity
  - We all have different vocations within the whole church. I'm not going to list them, but I want you all to think about what your vocation is within the life of this church.

- If our churches have a strong common life, they will be missionary churches that draw people in and have a strong outreach
- I end with a quote from Eric Liddell, the great Scottish Olympian athlete and missionary. He said, "We are all missionaries. Wherever we go, we either bring people nearer to Christ or we repel them from Christ."