

Parish of Central Saanich - St. Stephen's & St. Mary's
 LENT 2018 - BIBLE STUDY SERIES
"What the Church Is All About"

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Ephesians Study #2: "The Mission of the Church" (Chapters 1, 3)

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, in Jesus Christ you have revealed your purpose for the whole of creation, the reconciliation of all things through him; help us now, by your Holy Spirit, to see our part in enabling that to take place as agents and demonstrators of your plan, that your mission may be accomplished to the glory of your name. Amen.

Introduction

Last week, we began our study of what the Church is all about by looking at the nature of the Church – that it is a Temple, a Body and a Bride. At the heart of these realities we saw that the Church is the key to God's master plan, his goal for creation, as summarized in Ephesians 1:10: "to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ." We also saw that this is expanded in Colossians 1:20: God's plan is "...through Christ to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." This reconciliation is at the heart of the church's *message*; we have good news to share, "Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5: 20).

We also saw that not only is this reconciliation at the heart of the church's message, it is also at the heart of the church's *experience*. We noted that Christ's purpose was "To create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross" (Ephesians 2:15, 16). This "one body" is not just the physical body of Christ sacrificed for us on the cross, it is also the body which Jesus has brought into being through his resurrection, the church. And so, we saw that the church is to be the living experience and demonstration of the reconciliation and new life that Christ brings as stated in chapter 3: "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known" (Ephesians 3:10). As we have seen God's love in Jesus, so we are now to see it in and through the church – how we get along with each other, how barriers between people are broken down - what forgiveness and reconciliation look like.

In this way, we saw that the church is both the agent *and* the demonstration of God's plan, God's mission, to reconcile all things to himself. We don't just *tell* people about it. It is in and through us as the church that people are to *see* it taking place. So, the very nature of the Church involves

mission. As the theologian Emil Brunner said, “The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning”¹ The Church itself is part of God’s mission - to share and show God's plan.

This brings us to the topic of today’s session which is “The Mission of the Church.” I wanted to insert this study at this point in our series on Ephesians to prevent us from become too inwardly focussed as we look at “What the Church Is All About.” Indeed, you could say that mission is exactly “what the Church is all about! This session is to keep this crucial teaching arising out of Ephesians 1:10 and 3:10 before us as we delve into the ministry, worship, life and battle of the Church. You will note that for the rest of this session we will not be drawing too much from the letter to the Ephesians...it is not that there is nothing about mission there - in fact, the whole letter fills out the practical implications of being a missional Church as we will see over the next few weeks. It is that I want to look at mission from the wider sweep of Scripture into which the letter to the Ephesians fits.

Now, right away, we should see there is a problem with the phrase, “The Mission of the Church.” Taken simply, it means, what is the task or job of the Church that God has given us to do. However, it can also be seen as “our possession” – that the mission of the church is primarily something that belongs to us – “of the Church.” As we examine our mission, we need to remember that it is first of all about what God has done and is doing as we saw last week. The term used increasingly by theologians in the last fifty years² is the Latin “Missio Dei” – “The mission of God” or “the sending of God.” One of these people has said, "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."³ It is *God’s* mission that we join in as his agents and the demonstrators of his plan. Therefore, our task is to discern what God is doing and to join in. How that is to happen we will expand on in a moment but there is something we must do first.

Why do we do mission?

That something is to ask the question “Why?” Why should we share and demonstrate God's plan? We need to be clear about our motivation for mission because, if we are not, we will be confused in how we go about it and give out wrong signals about what God is doing in both what we say and do. For example, if we do mission in order to get into God’s good books we negate the reality that salvation is a gift of grace that people are to receive freely. If we do it out of fear – fear that God will get angry with us if we don’t do it – then we will convey a wrong impression about the God we are trying to represent.

Here then, are four biblical reasons, four motivations to do mission:

- i. The Love of God – Incarnational:* The first motivation for mission is rooted in the character and activity of God himself. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). It is God’s love

¹ Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (London: SCM Press, 1931), pg. 108.

² E.g. Lesslie Newbigin, Alan Roxburgh, , Tim Keller, and many others; see: Wikipedia article “mission Dei” found on https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missio_Dei

³ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, (London: SCM Press, 1977), pg. 64.

for us that has resulted in the mission to earth of his own Son. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19) describes the motivation which sends us out on Christ’s mission for us in the world. Our experience of God’s love in giving his own Son on the cross to reconcile us to himself is so overpowering, so constraining, that we are moved to risk our all in the task he calls us to do. God’s love is our first motivation for mission.

- ii. *The Glory of God – Doxological:*** Because of God’s love for us and our love for him in response, as a natural outcome of our gratitude, we want God’s glory to be shown through the extension of his kingdom. Jesus says that letting our light shine that people may see our good works in mission is to result in people giving glory to our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16)⁴ and that the Father will be glorified as we bear much fruit (John 15:8).⁵ Paul tells us the ultimate goal of Christ’s mission is that “every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). Our greatest desire is for God to be recognized for all that he is and has done for us. God’s glory is further motivation in our mission.
- iii. *The Command of God – Obedience:*** The third motivation for our mission is the command and commissioning of Christ. It is something he has told us to do. In John 14:15, Jesus says, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” In respect to the world, Jesus gave us both a “Great Commandment” and a “Great Commission”⁶ to obey. The former is a call to love our neighbour (e.g. Mark 12:31). The latter is a call to preach the Gospel and make disciples (e.g. Matthew 28:19-20). Both are essential elements of our mission as we will see in a few moments. We do mission because Christ told us to.
- iv. *The Coming of Christ – Eschatological:*** We are accountable to God. Paul says “We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Christ will return again and we do not know how much time we have left to carry out his mission. Many of Jesus’ parables (such as the wise and foolish virgins and the two house builders)⁷ and teachings (such as “Keep watch”)⁸ speak of being accountable to God for how we have used our gifts, resources, and time. But the nearness and certainty of Christ’s coming is not only a motive for our own sakes, it is also for the sake of others. The second coming of Christ brings to us the Day of Judgement. Ephesians is clear about those who reject the Gospel of Christ: “No immoral, impure or greedy person...has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 5:5-6). Christ is coming and judgement will take place. If we have received God’s loving salvation, will we not also have a loving concern to bring life

⁴ “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16)

⁵ “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit” (John 15:8).

⁶ I am grateful to John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 29, for his enunciation of these two calls to obedience at the centre of our mission.

⁷ E.g. the parables of the ten virgins, Matthew 25:1-13; the talents, Matthew 25:14-29; the sheep and the goats, Matthew 25:31-46; the two house builders, Luke 6:46-49; the shrewd manager, Luke 16:1-13, the rich fool, Luke 12:13-21.

⁸ E.g. the day and the hour unknown, Matthew 24:36-51; doing our duty, Luke 17:7-10.

in Christ to those around us still spiritually dead? We have come full circle in our motivation for mission, and returned back to the impetus for all mission, the love of God.

How do we do mission?

Now we will look at the question, "How do we do the mission of God?" As we have seen from Ephesians, God's essential purpose for the Church is to be the agent and demonstration of his will "to bring all things in heaven and on earth under one head, even Christ" (1:10, 3:10). We are agents and demonstrators; we will now look at both in more detail - but in reverse order. You see, if we are not demonstrating amongst ourselves God's love and power, how can we be agents to get others to receive his salvation?

1. We are demonstrators

We demonstrate God's salvation, his rescue plan, in three ways: through community, through worship and by deeds of power.

a. *Through community:* The New Testament has very few examples of direct teaching about evangelism but a lot of teaching about being a loving community. Gene Getz remarks:

By seeing love, non-Christians would come to *know* and *understand* that people are Christians...But by observing *unity and oneness* they would become *convinced* of who Jesus really was.⁹

Referring to the idea, "the medium is the message,"¹⁰ Getz affirms that it is actually a biblical concept. "It is the *medium* (the church as the body of Christ) that actually *becomes* the message to the unsaved world."¹¹ The church is not just to teach the faith, it is to live it out. The demonstration of community is an essential part of the foundation of mission.

b. *Through worship:* The importance of the role of worship for evangelism has also been noted by many Christian thinkers: "A praising community preaches to answer questions raised by its praise...When Christians are to be found really worshipping God, loving him, serving him, excited with him, and when their worship makes them into a caring community of love, then questions will certainly be asked, leading to excellent opportunities for sharing the good news of Christ."¹² But there is far more evangelistic impetus in worship than it being an occasion to raise and answer questions, valuable though that may be. In genuine worship, people experience the presence and power of God; they are pointed to him, his majesty and love, and confronted by him, his holiness and judgement. Paul speaks about the presence of non-Christians in early Church worship services (1 Corinthians 14:23-25), and the impact that it

⁹ "Interestingly, the epistles contain few instructions regarding direct evangelism...Great emphasis was placed on 'corporate' responsibility. Emphasis on 'verbal presentation' of the gospel was subordinated to 'maintaining a dynamic relationship within the Church' and 'maintaining a loving exemplary relationship' with those in the world. Opportunities to present the Gospel of Christ verbally were to grow naturally out of the saturation that took place in the community, saturation that reflected 'love and concern for all men.' ...Community evangelism was to be preceded by a corporate example of 'love' among believers." Gene A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1984), 57f.

¹⁰ First coined by Marshall McLuhan, Canadian thinker in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (NY: McGraw Hill, 1964).

⁸ Getz., *ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 166.

could have upon them: “The secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So, he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” Worship is at the core of our demonstration of the reality of God and thus, can be a crucial foundation for the evangelistic component of mission.

- c. **By deeds of power:** The final element of demonstration present in the early Church was the demonstration of the power of Christ through the Spirit in healing and “signs and wonders” and its release through prayer. In the gospels, this is an integral part of Jesus’ ministry as a sign of the inbreaking of the Kingdom. Jesus is involved in deliverance from evil Spirits and healing, as well as other signs (e.g. Mark 1:25, 34, 41, etc.) and the summary of his ministry is that, after extensive prayer, “he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons” (Mark 1:39). The ministry of the apostles has the same components: “They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them” (Mark 6:12-13). At the end of Mark’s Gospel (16:15-18), the Church is told that it will have the same authority to preach with accompanying signs and in Acts (1:8), that “you will receive power.” A secular historian, Ramsay McMullen, in *Christianizing the Roman Empire*,¹³ claims that it was the exercise of the miraculous and deliverance ministry that led to the conversion of the Roman Empire.¹⁴ The demonstration of the power of Christ through healings and signs and wonders released by prayer has now resurfaced as a major component in renewal and revival movements around the world.¹⁵ It is a major factor in the demonstrational foundation required for mission. We have looked at the issue of demonstration as the foundation for mission first because it is essential if the other components of mission are to flourish. They need to issue out of it, and indeed can only take place successfully, when they are practiced in the context of a loving, worshipping Christian community where prayer releases the Spirit’s power.

2. We are agents

Now we turn to the other components of mission and our role as agents for God’s plan. In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus tells us, “You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world.” As light, we are to show people the way to God and the ways of God. As salt, we are to act as a preservative and flavouring to bring healing and wholeness to society and God’s world. How this can happen has been defined in the Anglican Communion through the development of what is called “The Five

¹³ Ramsay McMullen, in *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (Hartford, CT: Yale UP, 1984),

¹⁴ McMullen points out that sociological or psychological reasons alone do not account for the fact that 5 million people, 10 percent of the Eastern Empire, were Christians by the year 300. “After St. Paul, the church had no mission (i.e. organized missionary effort); it made no organised or official approach to unbelievers; rather it left everything to the individual.” He argues that “If it were psychological rewards, that would only account for a few. Social rewards were more negative than positive: congregations were rather repellent of non-believers because they did not trust them (they could have been informers). Celsius spoke out against Christians because they attracted teenagers, slaves, women, children; they were ‘those who display their “trickery” in the market places.’” Ibid., 34. Through the ministry of these individual Christians, McMullen says that there was an “emphasis on the miraculous demonstration, head-on challenge of non-Christians to a test of power, head-on confrontation with supernatural beings inferior to God, and contemptuous dismissal of merely rational, especially Greek philosophical, paths toward the true knowledge of the divine.” Ibid., 112.

¹⁵ E.g., Cindy Jacobs, *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy* (Tarrytown, NY: Chosen Books, 1991); C. Peter Wagner and Douglas F. Pennoyer, eds., *Wrestling with Dark Angels* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990); C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992) and other volumes in the “Prayer Warrior Series.”

Marks of Mission." They have been developed by the Anglican Consultative Council since 1984 and have been widely adopted as an understanding of what contemporary mission is about.¹⁶ The comprise the "what" of mission. They are:

- i. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- ii. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- iii. To respond to human need by loving service
- iv. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- v. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Some churches have summarized them as: TELL – TEACH – TEND – TRANSFORM – TREASURE. We will look briefly at each in turn.

- i. **Tell:** To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom: this first mark of mission, talks about personal evangelism and is really a summary of what all mission is about, because it is based on Jesus' own summary of his mission, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 4:17 and see Mark 1:14-15, Luke 4:18, Luke 7:22; cf. John 3:14-17). Instead of being just one (albeit the first) of five distinct activities, this should be the key statement about everything we do in mission.¹⁷ It is primary in that evangelism gives birth to Christian life, but not alone, in that it does not sustain or embody that life. Without it, though, that life does not come into being. "The goal of evangelism is the formation of the Christian community."¹⁸ Evangelism is the second part of John Stott's helpful delineation of the Church's mission we saw earlier under the "Great Commandment" and the "Great Commission." Many definitions have been attempted and hotly debated; the word itself, *euangelizomai*, means "to announce the good news." The good news is that in Jesus, God has become King and that, because of his death for our sins and resurrection from the dead he reigns as Lord and Saviour at God's right hand, and invites people to turn in repentance and faith to be reconciled to God and belong to his eternal family, the Church, through the gift of his Spirit.¹⁹ Evangelism stands in the long Scriptural tradition which begins with God's call to Abraham in Genesis 12 to step out in faith in obedience and ends with the offer of Revelation 22:17 "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."
- ii. **Teach:** To teach, baptise and nurture new believers: Jesus is our model here. He spent a great deal of time mentoring and teaching his disciples, even away from the crowds and for extended periods. "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things..." (Mark

¹⁶ See <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/marks-of-mission.aspx> and <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1918854/the%20five%20marks%20of%20mission.pdf>

¹⁷ This is the view of the Anglican Communion website, <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/marks-of-mission.aspx> and also the position of the "Lausanne Covenant" formulated at the world-wide gathering of evangelicals in Lausanne, Switzerland in July 1974 declares that "In the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary." "The Lausanne Covenant", flyer (Wheaton, IL: LCWE, 1979).

¹⁸ Snyder, *The Community of the King*, 104.

¹⁹ Adapted from Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 54: The good news is Jesus. And the good news which we announce is that he died for our sins and was raised from death, and that in consequence he reigns as Lord and Saviour at God's right hand, and has authority both to command repentance and faith and to bestow forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit on all who repent, believe and are baptized.

8:27-31; see also Mark 6:30-32; 7:24-31). Acts (1:3) records that, after the resurrection, "He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God." The early church was very committed to teach and disciple people - we see Priscilla and Aquilla gently correcting Apollos in Acts 18:24-26 and hear of Paul's close attention to teaching in Acts 20:20, where he declares to the elders at Ephesus, "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house." His letters to Timothy are full of admonitions to teach and disciple faithfully (e.g. 1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:2; 4:2-5). Paul didn't just speak about matters but set an example for others to follow, as he says in his final charge to Timothy, " You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance..." (2 Tim. 3:10). Making disciples is a life-long process and involves commitment and deliberate action.

- iii. ***Tend:*** To respond to human need by loving service: caring for others through social assistance is the first half of social action (social justice comes next) and addresses people's immediate needs. Social responsibility is not some optional extra for the Church nor is it engaged in to make our evangelism credible, it is "simple uncomplicated compassion. Love has no need to justify itself. It merely expresses itself in service wherever it sees a need."²⁰ As we saw earlier, "Loving your neighbour" through caring for their needs is the second half of the Great Commandment (Mark 12:28-34) and encouraged throughout the Scriptures. (e.g. Micah 6:8: "To act justly and to love mercy"; James 1:27: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.") John reminds us that "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:17-18).
- iv. ***Transform:*** To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation: here we have the second half of social action - social justice, addressing the causes of people's distress. Without a concern to impact society with the benefits of the Gospel is to fail in the Church's mission; it will lose its "cutting edge." "When any community deteriorates, the blame should be attached where it belongs: not to the community which is going bad but to the Church which is failing in its responsibility as salt to stop it going bad."²¹ Social justice may involve us politically, as addressing the roots of a problem may require dealing with injustice or inequality in the social network. The Biblical view of God is that he is God of the nations as well as of his covenant people; he is a God of justice as well as of justification and that Jesus' Lordship extends to the whole of our lives, not just the "religious" bits.²² John Stott summarizes how this should shape our approach to the wider world as follows:
- Our neighbour is neither a bodyless soul that we should love only his soul, nor a soulless body that we should care for its welfare alone, nor even a body-soul isolated from society. God created man, who is my neighbour, a body-soul-in-community. Therefore, if we love our neighbour as God made him, we must

²⁰ Ibid., 30.

²¹ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 31f.

²² For a fuller treatment of this, see John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1990), 14-25.

inevitably be concerned for his total welfare the good of his soul, his body, and his community.²³

- v. **Treasure:** To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth: our original calling was to "Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28) and was put in the Garden of Eden "to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). As some of you know, I have called this "The Great Covenant" rounding out a trilogy with the Great Commission and the Great Commandment as signposts for mission. Christ's kingdom brings about the restoration of all things (Romans 8:19-21) including the restoration of creation which has been subject to "bondage and decay" due to our sin; the mission of the Church is to anticipate "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1) by taking seriously our stewardship of the earth God has lovingly provided for us.

Conclusion

I close our session where I began, that our job is to join in with what God is already doing. Summing up the five Marks of Mission, one of our Canadian church leaders makes this clear:²⁴

"The Marks of Mission are marks of alignment with the *missio Dei*, the mission that God initiates...The ministry of the church is to discern the shape and scope of God's mission in and for the world, and to join in the work that God is already doing, has been doing since 'In the beginning.'"

So, see what God is doing and join in! This is the heart of mission and a crucial part of what the Church is all about.

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you that you have made us servants of the gospel by your grace; help us, as your Church, through what we say and how we live, to make plain to all creation the eternal purpose which you accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord that in him we may approach you with freedom and confidence. Amen.

(Adapted from Ephesians 3: 7, 10-12)

²³ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 29.

²⁴ The Ven. Michael Thompson <http://www.anglican.ca/news/opinion-vision-2019-in-the-context-of-the-marks-of-mission/3006458/>