

Sunday 13 January 2008 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

Sermon Series: Being a Missionary People

Title: What is mission?

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Intro

Heading into 2008, I've felt God prompting me for a few months that the next series we grapple with together needs to be about what it means to be a missionary people.

Last term we focused on 'UP & IN' as we engaged with a series about 'Renovation of the Heart – learning to cultivate the character of Christ' and searched our hearts, attitudes and lifestyles to, as David puts it, 'see if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting' (Ps 139). Needless to say, I hope that we all keep engaging with this stuff into 2008! That's what the walk of discipleship is all about.

In the midst of last Autumn we heard Paul Mac unpack our church's (Phili & KC) vision as a whole to 'call our city back to God' (OUT) through mission and discipleship.

For KC as a church it feels like the last year or more, and into the future, is a time for a renewed focus on the OUTward dimension of our call to follow Jesus. We've seen various Alpha courses, lots of missional activity and growth in kids & youth fields etc. Its fair to say that the church's history meant that it didn't focus so much on the OUTward dimension in recent years, but now God's stirring up a missionary heart in us again. Part of that process is to do with choosing to join with Philadelphia – they are an established missional church, they order themselves around reaching out to the unsaved through community (called clusters), and leaders like Paul and Anne are radically focussed on what it means to be missionary disciples in today's world.

On top of that, we've got a great opportunity this year to get stuck in in word and deed on the back of **HOPE08**. It's a call to the church across the country to live and act God's missionary calling to Great Britain, and I expect it to help us get on board all the more.

So we're going to focus together for the next season on what it means to be a missionary people.

Taster of rest of series

We'll be looking together at various interesting themes like

- What do we mean when we talk about 'mission'?
- How does evangelism fit into the broader calling of mission?
- What does all this mean for you and me? How do we apply this stuff to our daily context – in schools, workplaces, in our neighbourhoods & networks
- The big question of 'what is church'? – And therefore, what should our church be like?

BIBLE READING: John 17:1-4, 13-18, 22, 24-26 (basically John 17:1-26)

1After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

13"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

22I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:

24"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

What do we understand by 'mission'?

We called out some ideas together about what we understand by 'mission'.

CLIP TO ILLUSTRATE - 2 mins - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xw5vtBwVdFs>

The nature of the Trinity is missional

When we talk about mission as Christians, it's not a new concept that was introduced by the early church, or by Jesus. You and I are called into mission as a lifestyle because mission is at the very heart of God. It's in the very nature of our God to be missional.

Our God is a missionary! When we talk about 'mission' - it's HIS MISSION - he started it, and he's gonna finish it - we just get to join in! God is a missionary, it's what He is *like*.... The nature of God the Trinity is to reach out, to call out, to send out into humankind and the wider creation (see Romans 8:18-25)

- In the beginning, God created his realm (the heavens) and then reached out to create ours (earth)
- Technically, the Trinity is self-sufficient (he doesn't *need* anyone else except Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and yet it's part of his nature to be outgoing - he's an extrovert! The Trinity lives in community - there are 3 of them - and they like company!
 - The Trinity is out-going, giving.
 - Jesus said 'I've come to seek and save the lost' - that sounds like an outgoing, seeking, giving, reaching God to me.
 - He created us, He reached out to redeem humanity, He sent His spirit to help complete the work through us
 - He's still reaching out, minute by minute, for hope, peace, healing, the poor, the lowly, the oppressed You and I know this - because it's happened to us. Once we were in darkness, now we are in light. Once I was lost, now I am found!

So we need to think of mission as outgoing, sending, giving, seeking. And mission is simply what God does, and who God is. God is a missionary! All three members of the Trinity are missionaries. It's always God's mission and His activity, and we are privileged to be called into it, and given roles within it. I've shared this before but it's worth repeating.... Rowan Williams' *definition of mission - "Finding out what God's doing and joining in"*

What this means for God's followers

If God is a missionary. What do you think this means for those people who follow Him?

- **God's mission is therefore our mission. God's people are a missionary people.** He sends. We are sent.
- We are designed to follow God in His ways. He's a missionary, so should we be. In our context, in our streets, in our lifestyles of promoting God's kingdom ways.
 - *William Temple "The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members."*

What might this mean practically?

But when I talk of mission, I don't just mean evangelism. Sometimes we think that God's agenda is just about personal salvation. Not just 'life after death' salvation, its life before death!

Mission is: The Kingdom of God touching the world. We're part of God's mission when we facilitate, or initiate, all aspects of his kingdom in the world around us. Communicating to others through actions and sometimes words God's nature & kingdom which is:

- Justice
 - Buying fair trade, campaigning about sweatshop labour
- Peace
 - Refereeing reconciliation between 2 warring-colleagues at work
- Unity (Jesus prayed for it)
 - HOPE08 – working together to love and serve our city
- The Poor
 - In every age, and biblically – God is on the side of the poor (bc of his heart for justice & righteousness). Therefore, the church should actively seek justice, equality & sacrificial love on behalf of the poor too
- Communicating the good news
 - evangelism with a call to follow God (discipleship)
 - It's a vital part of mission, but certainly not all mission is about
- Hope
 - Working with the disadvantaged or special needs to improve their opportunities in life gives people greater hope for the future
- Righteous living in the now
 - Is actually attractive, whatever the media say. That's how our mum's attract folk to come on Alpha, bc they see their lives and are impressed
- Breaking down man-made social boundaries & distinctions
 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28). Eg. social inclusion, childcare provision, adoption etc – city council
- Freedom (from Exodus to Jesus – the same theme)
 - From sickness through healing, or mindsets, or oppression
- Redemption theme
 - Restoring & putting right whole cultures, communities, business, the whole context! (not just individual people) That's why I want us to engage with our city, not retreat from it because it's not a comfortable Christian bubble.
- Life to the full, in the NOW (so said Jesus)

We are all supposed to join in, with both feet, with God's mission to this wonderful world. Mission wasn't ever intended to be something you did once a term, or once a year. Not intended to be something that only happens overseas. Foreign mission and home mission are the same task, just in different arenas or something done by 'professional' missionaries who are paid to go off and 'do mission

Mission is God's task 24/7, and is our task 24/7 – when-ever, where-ever. Every Christian is 'sent' by God – every Christian has the HS available to empower them. In ordinary lives and works. **Our job is to find out our present 'calling', and get on with it in the grace and love that God gives.**

HOPE08

“The missionary task is as broad and deep. In easy-speak its ‘the whole church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world’

Sound familiar? HOPE08 strapline = **Whole Church Whole Nation Whole Year**

Doing an hour of prayer at HOPE08 recently made me realise just how much Christians are already touching our nation: workplace, schooling, caring professions, voluntary sector would fall apart without the Christian backbone. There’s no reason to be discouraged about mission, or look at it as a massive uphill task that we’ll never achieve! Actually, its part of life, it can be fun, its serving God in action as well as words

The problem of ‘church’

This understanding of mission as our calling is really important because it ought to fundamentally influence the way we ‘do’ church, as well as how we ‘do’ daily life, worklife etc. **We should be willing to take a careful look at what the bible calls us to be like as a community of Jesus followers. Let’s not just do church for the sake of it, let’s do kingdom! Let’s not just do programmes or events or services for the sake of it, let’s do kingdom!**

This applies to leaders to. Don’t have the attitude that because you are paying me, or Lisa, or Leighton then we’ll do all the work. You are actually paying me so that I can equip and resource YOU to live missionally, while I do the same.

If you take this seriously, it means that any church structures that actually get in the way of promoting mission should be seen as heretical! Against our faith, our gospel. That’s why we push a balance of UP, IN and OUT in all KC’s activities, and in each of our lives.

- Church is a wonderful by-product of the kingdom
- *The cause* is the kingdom, *one of the effects* is the church – not the other way around

I’ve asked this question before, and it’s worth repeating: How do you see church? Is it ‘serve us’ or ‘service’?

This year I want KC to be brave and open to God as we work out how *we* need to look and feel as a community to best further God’s ways & his kingdom in Sheffield. It might mean change. It might mean it looks different in a year or so to what it does today. God will take us there, if its right and if we let Him.

Kingdom focus is vital

- The Church is not the kingdom of God.
 - It is a seed, an instrument of it, a sign of the future perfect Kdom
 - The Kdom comes in society as well as in church
 - Again, that’s why HOPE08 is such a great opportunity for us to live out the good news in word and deed
- **We are called to be kingdom people, not church people**
 - “Kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church change the world.” (Synder)¹

¹ Quote from a 1983 publication by Mr Synder, in *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, David Bosch, Orbis: 1991, p.378

We need to pray for a passion for the kingdom and experiencing the love of God, out of which will come a passion for mission & evangelism.

- The big picture is the kingdom
- Within which we understand that God is missional, and we are called to be a missionary people
- Within which comes the task of evangelism – proclaiming the good news to bring folks into relationship and discipleship (very much NOT just praying the prayer!)
- And the joy of furthering the kingdom into every aspect of the world – because that is all *mission*

Be encouraged

We're already living it. Christian presence, action, incarnation – not just evangelism

Conclusion

I want you to take away from today

- Mission is broad and easy!
 - Lifestyle – 24/7 opportunities in every place, context
 - Don't box it
- Mission is more than evangelism
 - But don't see that as an excuse to avoid evangelism!

QUESTION? If a definition of mission is “Finding out what God's doing and joining in”

- Then what are you seeing God doing in & around your life?
- Where is he prompting you?
- What's he put in your heart?
- What opportunities are *already there for you to take* – at work etc

Great Commission – “I WILL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS” (Jesus)

QUESTION? – Are you trying to operate in your own strength, or God's?