

20151115MissionSunday

St Andrewstide is normally the time when the church examines mission and encourages its members to play a part in Mission. This is because Andrew was the first 'missionary' because he went and told his brother, John, about Jesus. Unfortunately nearest Sunday to St Andrew's Day clashes with Feast of Christ the King and Advent Sunday – I know all about that clash because I was Rector of St Andrews Steenberg and our patronal festival clashed constantly with these other major church festivals. This is the reason I have transferred Mission Sunday to today.

We, as a church must examine the concept of mission because of the Great Commission which Jesus gave us and was our Gospel Reading this morning: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.* So, it is a command from Jesus to carry out mission, it is not an added extra to our faith.

I want to share with you two examples which we will use as a springboard for our thoughts on mission. The First example was when I was at Camps Bay parish. The ministers' fraternal used to meet in different churches on a monthly basis and one of these churches was the Christian Atlantic Assembly. In their foyer they had a big map of the world. Over the map were the words: "Where members of our congregation are doing missionary work" and radiating out from Cape Town were ribbons going to Ukraine, Korea, Thailand, Russia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico. I noticed none were going to Sea Point itself! So, I asked one of the pastors: You've got missionaries over all the world, do you have any going to the prostitutes in London Road, or the rent boys and drug addicts on the beach front or the refugees from the rest of Africa in the dilapidated blocks of flats in the back streets?" His response was interesting: "Oh, that's not mission, that's evangelism."

So for many Christians mission means the sending of believers from one nation to another to convert the people of that other nation to Christianity. But the ridiculousness of this idea was demonstrated to me when Prof Kritzinger – the UNISA professor of Missiology, spoke at an Interfaith Symposium I was attending in Lenasia a few years back. It had opened with a worship service led by all the different faith groups including a Chinese couple from Taiwan who sang Psalm 23 in Mandarin. Prof Kritzinger said to us the next day that this couple were missionaries sent from their church in Taipei as missionaries to Africa, "while my daughter," he said, "has been sent by the DRC to Taiwan as missionary to the Chinese."

Now, we could discuss Mission compared to Evangelism for hours without coming to any conclusion but we must remember that the Anglican Church worldwide has what it calls *The Five Marks of Mission* and I'll come to that shortly.

My Second example to set us thinking was an entry in our Dioceses *Prayer for Parishes* a few years ago. It was the entry for a well known Evangelical parish just down the road and it began: *The only purpose of the Church is to bring others to Jesus...* The certainly set me thinking. Is that truly the only purpose? Yes, it is obeying that Great Commission I mentioned just now, but to me it seemed too much like a pyramid-scheme type of sales pitch. Companies such as Amway, Sportron and even Tupperware who through parties in peoples' homes, sell products but often spend more time trying to recruit more dealers than actually selling the products. If we look at Christianity's sole purpose as recruiting new members, aren't we perhaps behaving in this pyramid-scheme type of selling? Do we have products to sell people or are we merely signing them up as new missionaries?

I believe we do have a product – we have Jesus. When I visited Val Heighway last week at Kingsbury, the parking attendant outside the Claremont Library asked me, what was this Communion, I was taking to the hospital. I told him it Jesus' body and blood. 'But surely,' he said, 'God is a spirit, God is not bread and wine?' A long theological discussion ensued. But he was to a certain extent right. We have Jesus to sell but unlike Tupperware, we can't demonstrate the product. Or can we?

Jesus promised us eternal life. Is that why I decided to follow him? To have eternal life? Well, yes but then Frederick Faber's hymn came to mind. *My God, I love thee; not because// I hope for heaven thereby, nor yet because who love thee not// are lost eternally. Thou, O Lord Jesus, thou didst me upon the cross embrace; for me didst bear the nails and spear, and manifold disgrace, Then why, O blessed Jesus Christ, should I not love thee well, not for the sake of winning heaven, nor any fear of hell; not with the hope of gaining aught, not seeking a reward; but as thyself hast loved me, O ever loving Lord! So would I love thee, dearest Lord, and in thy praise will sing, solely because thou art my God and my most loving King.*

If we are 'solely loving' Jesus because of what he did for us, then surely we should strive to do for others the same things? We should be striving to serve others, regardless of who they are or what they believe. For example we should prayer for all who are writing exams at UCT over the next few weeks not just those who are members of our parish and put their names on the list or just Anglican or just Christians but everyone.

We should welcome those who do come to worship here, teaching them more about Jesus, nurturing their faith. We should be challenging all unjust structures in our society – even if we get accused of mixing religion and politics. That is what Jesus would have done. We must challenge violence and strive for peace. Our Archbishop Thabo has taken an active role in this, especially in the #feesmustfall protests and has asked the parishes to play their part too. We must strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. This year other parishes of the Archdeaconry had a Season of Creation during September but because of my sabbatical we didn't but my thanks to Fr Darren for giving us one Sunday dealing with Creation and the Environment. These are the things we do because of the product, because of Jesus.

Do you know what I have just done? I've given you four of the five marks of mission of the Anglican Church as decided on by worldwide Anglican Consultative Council. These marks are part of being a missionary Church, whci we must be. The last mark? Well, actually it is the first mark of mission - *To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*. That mark comes the closes to that 'sole purpose' that that evangelical church was talking about. It is an important mark because if we just concentrate on the other 4 then we are running a club for people who all think alike. And that is not the Church. And soon we would find that our same-thinking members would die out

I've been here in this parish eleven years and paging through the Burial Register recently I saw the number of Good Christian believers I have buried. Are they being replaced? Are we striving to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom to others to add to our numbers so that we can: teach, baptise and nurture new believers; respond to human need by loving service; transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation; strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth? These 5 marks come as a package, we cannot do some of them. It is all or nothing. So, next year without a rector until the bishop appoints one, it is going to be up to you to carry out the five marks of mission here in Rondebosch.

If you didn't catch those five marks as I went through them now, I'll place this sermon on our webpage and also list the five marks of mission there and in a hand out next week.