

The five marks of mission 1

To proclaim the good news of the kingdom

Great inventors are people who see a need and then find a way to meet that need.

Of course, some inventions have not stood the test of time – who can forget the Sinclair C5?

But successful inventions have helped us as human beings to solve problems, lead more fulfilled lives... to make the world a better place.

Over the next 5 weeks in church we are wanting to look at one of the great inventions of God – the church – and ask the question “what is it for?”.

Its no accident that we’ve chosen this period between Easter Day (when Jesus rose from the dead) and Pentecost Sunday (when God poured out his Holy Spirit on the first believers) to explore this topic.

We’ve spent the first half of the church year focusing on the events of Jesus’ life – notably his birth at Christmas and his death and resurrection in Holy Week and Easter.

Our focus is now going to turn to “so what?”.

Given that Jesus lived among us, died for us and rose again, what does that mean for how we live our lives?

We’ll pray through this Easter season for God to pour out his Holy Spirit on us and all the church; with a particular focus on this between Ascension and Pentecost with the nine days of “Thy Kingdom Come”.

And then through the season on Trinity we’ll be looking at how we put our faith into practice.

So, in this context, it makes sense to ask this question, “what is the Church for?”.

Is it a question, I wonder, you have ever given much thought to?

I guess most people in society today wouldn’t have given the question much thought.

At worst they might suppose the mission of the church is to look after old buildings and run organ recitals and coffee mornings.

At best some might think the church is a kind of social services run by kind people who like to meet on a Sunday morning to sing choral music.

Fortunately, the Anglican Communion has spent quite some time articulating what it believes Church is for.

Based on the mission of Jesus as revealed in the Scriptures, and believing that Jesus founded the church to continue his mission, the Anglican Communion states:

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

- 1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*
- 2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers*
- 3. To respond to human need by loving service*
- 4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation*
- 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth*

Our hope is that over the next 5 weeks we'll, as a church, be affirmed in what it is God has created us for and encouraged to work and pray for it.

So, today we are focusing on the first of the five reasons for the Church's existence; the first mark of mission: To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.

You'll recall, I'm sure, how when Jesus began his mission in earth, he stood up in a synagogue in Nazareth and read from the book of Isaiah, chapter 43:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour"*

This was Jesus statement of intent as he began his work.

In Matthew 4.17, Matthew records that:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near".

Jesus clearly understood his mission to be to establish God's kingdom on earth.

This is what Jesus told his disciples to pray for:

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

This is what Jesus demonstrated not just in his exorcisms, healings and raising the dead, but in his love and compassion; in the way he treated people.

This is what Jesus taught.

Jesus clearly believed that in his coming, the kingdom of God had descended from heaven to earth.

And although it was starting out small – even as a mustard seed – over time it would grow into something truly awesome.

Jesus' call was for people, in the light of the coming of the kingdom, to repent; meaning to turn around.

Jesus' call was for each human being to turn to God, align themselves with his purposes and live as a subject of this Kingdom of God.

Jesus death on the cross would be necessary:

To make it possible for humans to put forgiven their failure to live as subjects of their heavenly king and to enter the kingdom for eternity.

And to defeat evil and death (both which have no place in God's kingdom).

All this Jesus did whilst on earth.

Now, Jesus is ascended to heaven, from where he pours out his Spirit on all believers to empower them to continue to "Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God".

When the time is right, Jesus will return to earth, to banish evil and death, create a new heaven and earth, and establish fully and for all time the reign of God and his kingdom.

And this is truly "good news".

God has not left us as human beings to our own devices – to wallow in the mess that we make when we run the world ourselves.

You only have to look at the events of the last few weeks to realise what a disaster that would be!

No – the Good News is that God loves the world he has made, the people he has made in his own image. And he's acted to sort out the mess.

At present it's a work in progress.

But how glorious it will be when it is completed.

How terrible it will be for those who've refused to be part of it; who've worked against the King and his good plans.

But how wonderful for those who submitted to their heavenly King, aligned themselves with his purposes and worked for that day!

So, what does this mean for us as the church today?

A few very practical suggestions:

1. We need to get on board with God's Kingdom.

As we've seen, Jesus' call was, in the light of God's kingly reign, to repent; to align our lives with God and his purposes.

This means acknowledging God as our king and Jesus as our lord and living as his subjects.

It means putting behind us all that is contrary to God's good plans and striving to live as he says is right.

What in our lives needs to change?

2. We need to orientate our lives around God's kingdom.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount gives us a good place to start:

Living for God rather than worldly gain – prioritising God's kingdom over building our own little empires.

Being non-judgemental; generous.

Loving our enemies and seeking to bless them.

Being peacemakers.

Where are we setting our heart? Is it in the right place?

3. We need to proclaim the kingdom.

If I hear once more the phrase attributed to St Francis, "go and preach the gospel. Use words if you have to" I think I'll scream!

St Francis never said it!

St Francis was a preacher. He even preached to the animals!

Of course Christians must show the good news of God's kingdom in what they do.

But they must also explain the kingdom with words.

Jesus did!

Our actions give a context for people to hear, receive and understand our words.

But actions on their own are not enough.

Listen to what St Paul wrote to the Romans in Romans 10.13-14:

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

The mission of the church is to Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God. To do so will takes words and actions.

So, what can you do in your context, at home, in the community at work to "proclaim" the kingdom of God?

This is what we'll be looking at in homegroups this term through our "fruitfulness on the Frontline" course.

If you can get to a group please do so. If you can't please read the book.

Its not that we are called to be Christians who shove the Gospel insensitively down peoples' throats.

But we are called to share and show good news, in word and action, as the Spirit gives us opportunity.

This morning, I wanted to issue you all, us all, with a challenge.

Where is our heart set – on the world as it is now, or on the new heaven and earth where God reigns supreme? Where under God's benevolent kingly rule all is well.

If you want to commit or recommit to being a servant, soldier, agent, of the heavenly king, you might want to pray this prayer with me now:

Father God,
You sent your son, Jesus, to establish your reign on earth as it is in heaven;
We have heard your call to repent and align our lives with you.

We commit ourselves to respond to that call.
Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may make good on that commitment.

We commit to proclaiming in word and action the Good News of your
kingdom.
Give us the wisdom, grace and kindness to do this appropriately.

Help us never to become discouraged or give up.
And make us fruitful for your kingdom,
That you might be glorified and the world might experience the joy and peace
of living under your benevolent rule.
In Jesus name,
Amen