

Building a missional church: Week 2 - A changed calling

“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’”

(John 20:21)

Our word mission comes from the Latin for sending (missio) while apostle similarly comes from the Greek (ἀπόστολος (*apóstolos*), meaning "one who is sent away")

The end of ‘Christendom’

For its first 300 years the church was counter-cultural. Then in the decades following Constantine in the fourth century AD, it became first respectable and then obligatory: by 529AD, Justinian could proclaim that simply by being a Roman citizen you were (unless a Jew) a Christian.

Discipleship became essentially loyal citizenship, rather than commitment to the counter-cultural values of God’s kingdom. Jesus was, it has been said, worshipped but no longer followed. Other changes to belief and practice included:

- Women being seen as second class – essentially the church picking up the culture around them at the time
- The creation of ‘just war’ theory
- A split between laity and clergy with the former largely relegated to a passive role.
- In seeking to what might constitute a ‘religious state’ the church often turned away from the gospel and raided the Old Testament for models.

This close alignment of church and state – known as Christendom – survived largely intact until the middle years of the last century¹ but is now largely consigned to history.

As we witness the end of this era of the church’s history we see it move from being an institution to a movement; from privilege to plurality; from majority to minority, from the centre to the margins and from being natives to exiles – or should that be migrants? **How will changes such as these lead to us act and think differently as individuals and as a church?**

Mission not maintenance

During the era of Christendom and within its boundaries, there was simply no need for mission – it could be assumed you were a Christian and the most your faith might need was the occasional spring clean. Mission, if considered at all, was something for professional missionaries to do ‘out there’.

Even 70 years ago the CofE recognised that this era was passed and in a report called *‘Towards the conversion of England’* noted that, “...the clerk the artisan, the farmer and the labourer, should be called on to address Church gatherings on “my job” as naturally as are missionaries on furlough.”

How do we recover the notion that mission is for all us rather than just being for a small group of professionals as was introduced by Christendom thinking?

Missio Dei

“God’s church falters from exhaustion because Christians erroneously think that God has given them a mission to perform in the world. Rather, the God of mission has given his church to the world. It is not the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a church in the world. The church’s involvement in mission is its privileged participation in the actions of the triune God.”

(Beyond Duty: A Passion for Christ, a Heart for Mission by Tim Dearborn)

This mission (or sending) of God – often called Missio Dei² – should be what constitutes the church. It has been described as “participating with God in the redemption of the world”.

How do we find out what God is doing in the community around us? How do we go about joining in?

¹ See <http://missionalchurchnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/christendom-murray.pdf> for more detail

² See <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/principles/community> for a fuller consideration

A Kodak Moment?

It's quite a simple story: Kodak dominated the photographic scene for over 100 years. In 1975 a Kodak engineer Steve Sasson created the first digital camera ... management's reaction was, "That's cute, but don't tell anyone about it." In 2012 the company filed for bankruptcy after its film market had been largely swept away by ... digital cameras. Let's consider three areas where their management failed:

- 1. *They didn't understand why they existed.*** They thought they were in the film business—instead of the imaging business. **How do we sometimes confuse the church's methodologies and legacies with our real mission?**
- 2. *They failed to understand the changing times.*** Kodak's leaders didn't recognize the pace and character of change in the culture. They thought people would try digital and then return to the quality of film.
- 3. *They feared losing what they saw as current success.*** Kodak had become a hostage of its own success, fearing that digital cameras would damage its (then) profitable film business. **Does the church fear to change because the ways we do things now still appear to work?**

Think through the similarities between Kodak and the church over the past centuries and today. God is already moving into the future. **How can we find the courage to move with him?**

Like Kodak the church finds itself part way through a time of change when the future is still unclear and the past remains attractive though increasingly unreal. We cannot return to that earlier, more comfortable era and to attempt to would simply be a dead-end.

How do we find courage to go on and not retreat back to an apparently more favourable past?

Our PCC is currently just over half way through studying the nine factors relating to church growth identified as part of the Evidence to Action research noted last week. You can see a summary of our discussions in the Council minutes.

Closing Prayer

O, Lord my God
Teach my heart this day where and how to see you,
Where and how to find you.
You have made me and remade me,
And you have bestowed on me all the good things I possess,
And still I do not know you.
I have not yet done that for which I was made.
Teach me to seek you,
For I cannot seek you unless you teach me,
Or find you unless you show yourself to me.
Let me seek you in my desire,
Let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you,
Let me love you when I find you.

Anselm of Canterbury