

Building a missional church: Week 5 – Changed Community

“Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (Jeremiah 29:7)

2 Corinthians 5 describes the church, by implication, as a community of exiles in our present world.

How can we follow the command in Jeremiah given to that earlier community in exile?

What the church is for

“The church is to be the primary agent of mission and if it does not exhibit evident community and transformed lives then any amount of evangelistic events and church projects will have limited credibility.” (Lesslie Newbigin)

“Church – if it does not provide at least the shadow of another, better world – what Christians call the kingdom of Heaven – it will be an absolute failure” (Andrew Brown and Linda Woodhead³.)

“... church is what happens when people encounter the risen Jesus.” (Rowan Williams)

Consider how these thoughts could influence our way ahead at St James.

Listen [here](#) where Jeff Maguire describes what it means if we really are to be, *“the whole church with the power of the whole gospel for the whole world.”*

In what ways are we helping members to be effective Christians in the workplace and our other ‘front-lines’?

Five Marks of Mission

It may be useful at this point to pause for a moment and reflect on the five marks of mission adopted by the Lambeth Conference in 1988⁴.

- To **proclaim** the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and **nurture** new believers
- To **respond** to human need by loving service
- To **seek** to transform unjust structures of society
- To **strive** to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

What would a community shaped around these principles look like? How could we ensure these are at the centre of all we do and are?

Missional Community

This [video](#) gives a brief insight into what being missional church might mean...

Today, society is more open to spiritual questions but, sadly, people are not banging on our church doors looking for answers. It seems that they just don’t connect spirituality with the church. We need to find new ways of engaging with the spiritually hungry in their worlds, instead of expecting them to come to ours.

What will posterity see as the greatest blind spots of the 21st century church?

Followers of Jesus

Jesus, when he met people, seems to have been most interested to change the future course of their life rather than check up on whether or not they adhered to specific rules – which side of some line they lay. Indeed the one group of people who he seems to have actually been angry with were the ultimate line-drawers of his day, the Pharisees.

³ From their book *That was the church that was*

⁴ You can read more about them [here](#).

His command was to follow – some followers will of course be close, others, as yet, far off. What matters though is their direction of travel and where their gaze is focussed. Too often the church seems to want to build a wall part way along that line of followers and exclude those outside it.

How can learn to start where people are and travel with them on their journey?

It also has an important bearing on our own focus – is it on the boundary which differentiates us from others or is it on the centre; on Jesus?

If you want to think this through further, here is a [description](#) of looking at church as either a boundary or the centre.

We may therefore need to see people as belonging to the church before their beliefs are fully formed and long before some elements of their behaviour accord to what we think of as Christian standards?

How can we be a community of Jesus' followers that accepts all who look towards Jesus and follow him?

Reflecting – and acting

Choose one of the passages you didn't look at last week; read it aloud, wait a short while in quiet and then read it again

- Our call to service: Matthew 25.31-41
- Our call to bring about justice: Luke 1.46-55
- Our call to grow more disciples: Matthew 28.16-20

Which of our current activities (include both what church members do at work or through volunteering and what we do as a congregation) respond to the challenge of the passage.

Compare this with what we found out about our local community last week. **Who do our activities reach? Who do we not contact? Why is this so?**

Do we have the capacity or calling to reach them – perhaps through supporting individuals or jointly as a congregation? If 'Yes', how could we start?

A final reflection

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." (Ephesian 3:20)

If we're going to be missional at all then we have to step out of our own community. As part of your prayers tonight use the song [here](#) as a reflection centring on the thought that we are, in its words, "...standing in wide open spaces of your grace".

Postscript

Among the less-reported items brought to the recent General Synod was the report [Setting God's People Free](#). This identifies two shifts in culture and practice that, in its words, will be critical to the flourishing of the Church and the evangelisation of the nation:

1. *Until, together, ordained and lay, we form and equip lay people to follow Jesus confidently in every sphere of life in ways that demonstrate the Gospel we will never set God's people free to evangelise the nation.*
2. *Until laity and clergy are convinced, based on their baptismal mutuality, that they are equal in worth and status, complementary in gifting and vocation, mutually accountable in discipleship, and equal partners in mission, we will never form Christian communities that can evangelise the nation.*