

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 8th July 2018
Trinity 5 (proper 9)

What does mission look like today?

You know me, I like to set a challenge and today's challenge is very immediate. I'd like you to get into pairs, leave your handbags and stuff where it is. It'll be safe, I'll lock up the church. And I want you to go out and speak to people about the good news of Jesus. Come back in say an hour and let us know what happened. Is that ok? No, I thought not. Not in our English genes. It's not a very comfortable idea and is very challenging. But that is the challenge of the story before us today. That is what Jesus told the disciples to do and through them, us.

There are two mission stories here in this passage. They are important because they tell us what can be done in the power of the Holy Spirit and the fact that mission wasn't easy, even for Jesus.

By this point in the gospel of Mark lots has happened. Jesus has quelled storms, healed the demon possessed, taught with profundity, gathered crowds around him and raised the dead. You would have thought then when he went home those who knew him would welcome him with open arms. Instead they questioned him, they wouldn't believe him, they almost drove him out. Their unbelief was so deep that he couldn't even perform many miracles, and that's not because the power of Holy Spirit is affected by levels of belief but because not many were brought to him for healing. They didn't believe he could heal.

This rejection though did not stop him in his mission to preach the good news of salvation in the world. He continued his mission, commissioning his own disciples to continue his work. This is the second mission story; the disciples are sent, in pairs, to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God. They will know how tough this mission would be. They have seen their master fail, but they went. His command that they take nothing with them emphasises the importance of the message they were taking. They were not to be hindered even by the worries of possessions. They were to rely on God ensuring their needs were met, even to the point of providing shelter and sustenance. We only have half this story today and in a couple of weeks we'll have the rest of it when the disciples return and the work they have done was so successful that crowds are pressing in to hear the good news, to receive God anew into their lives. This busy-ness is so great that Jesus must take the disciples away to refresh them and renew them in their mission.

Mission is a subject, as a church, we neglect because we find it challenging. When we do talk about it we mean that mission that takes place in far flung places of the world. We imagine the nineteenth century missionaries who went to China and Africa and India. We think of the mission societies who take bibles to dark corners of our world, who feed the poor or build schools. All good things but those images keep mission at arm's length.

If there is one thing the church must face up to today, it is the mission Jesus sets before it, not just to preach the good news far off but to preach it here, now, in this place. Our very own world, our community, our neighbourhood need to hear the good news of Jesus. It is heart breaking to realise how few people know anything of the good news of Jesus and they live in our streets. I realise we live in a multicultural world, but then so did Jesus. There were probably as many if not more religions around in Jesus' time. Yet this was not seen as a bar to preaching the good news. For us it has become more of an excuse.

If we are to understand mission we should understand that Jesus doesn't ask us to beat people over the head with the bible, to force them into faith in him. What he does want is for his followers to share how Jesus has changed their lives, how he has made them more than they would have been. How Jesus brings the love of God into a broken and lost world. If the message is heard, that is all Jesus expects of us. If those who hear are touched by the power of the Holy Spirit then they make their own response. They come forward for baptism and prayer. Our job is done. Still we shy away.

We shy away because we do not like to confront. Again this is not the way of Jesus. He taught those who wished to hear. He showed God's love for his people through actions, through healing, wisdom and wise council. He didn't get into arguments, when that happened others brought the argument to him. It is by example, by living the Holy Spirit that Jesus encouraged his disciples to proclaim the good news.

This is how we are encouraged through the gospel to share in mission. By our words, our actions, our wisdom. "I don't have that", I hear you say. Why don't you? You are baptised Christians who hear the word of God preached week by week. You hear the gospel read. Hopefully you pray each day and may even read your scriptures daily, studying your faith. So why can't you talk about the good news of Jesus? We shouldn't make the mistake of saying this is the clergy's job either. It is the responsibility of all Christians given them through their baptism.

Next week we celebrate the 125th anniversary of this parish. We have planned a party and a Sunday celebration to which our community has been invited. This is a missional opportunity. I may not be sending you out into the parish in pairs to share the good news of Jesus, I am suggesting you make sure that you are here to share the good news with those who come and visit. I am suggesting that as you leave church today you think about what opportunities you might have to share the good news of Jesus in your work, your home, where you play. If there is to be a 200th anniversary, then we, like the disciples, must go out and share the good news of Jesus. The only obstacle to the gospel in the modern day is not secularism, it is us.