

CORE TASK - MISSION
JOHN 12:20-33

What's your mission in life? Maybe that's too grand a question for you; you may not think you have a mission in life! What's the Church's mission in life? That's more like a question we can understand, even if we're not entirely sure of the answer! Mission is one of the 5 Core Tasks that we described in 2001 and every so often we have revisited these Core Tasks to remind ourselves of our Church priorities! These 5 Core Tasks are worship, nurture, prayer, mission and service: the three previous sermons are in print on the church website and the audio versions are in the library. Mission – there are all kinds of answers to the question “what is the Church's mission in the world?” We are going to find an answer in John chapter 12.

The Church's mission comes out of and is shaped by Jesus' mission. Why did Jesus come? *“The hour...”* (12:23) Until this point in John, Jesus has been saying “Not yet... not yet...” but now He says “the time has come”. Time for what? It is clear that the time has come for Jesus to die. The whole theme of these verses is the death of Jesus: the seed that falls into the ground and dies; *“now my...”* (12:27) The very reason for Jesus' coming is the cross and His death. This is hard to take for some people; how such a good man, capable of such good deeds and wise teaching - how this man can die on cross? Yet for Jesus this was the whole reason for His coming; the cross was at the centre of His mission in the world. He came to be the Saviour of the world and our Saviour and that undoubtedly meant for Jesus that He would have to die. The resurrection is the guarantee that the cross works. So, *“I when...”* (12:32) The cross works; Jesus is the Saviour and people come to Him in faith.

“I when...” These words can be taken in 3 ways.

1. Jesus was lifted up to die on the cross – John adds the editorial comment *“He said...”* (v33) Physically, Jesus was lifted up on a cross to die. This was the nature of crucifixion; people were hoisted up on a cross and that was what made the cross such a dreadful punishment, with its long, slow, agonising death. The cross is repulsive, a place of execution. But the cross has become the universal symbol of Christian faith because it is the place where Jesus died and where he completed His work as Saviour. The gospel tells us that Jesus died for us and that has a magnetic appeal; Jesus sacrificed His life for us so that we might come to God, that we might find forgiveness, peace, hope etc. The centre of God's mission to bless the world is the self-sacrifice of His Son on the cross; the centre of Jesus' mission to do the will of God is His death on the cross.

2. Jesus was lifted up at the resurrection – the next kind of ‘lifting up’ for Jesus was the resurrection and ascension. The cross and death are not the end; if it was the end, then Jesus was just some dead hero to remember. The resurrection changes all of that; He is the living Saviour whom we celebrate and love. He is lifted up in the resurrection, Jesus is Lord and King; Jesus is full of power and life. These two senses are found in the single word ‘lifted up’; we see that same double meaning elsewhere in John's gospel. People are drawn to someone who can transform their lives just as His own was transformed. So as we sit together round the communion table, this is not a memorial service for someone who died and whose good life we remember; we do this in Jesus' presence; He is here, the risen Lord present with His people, to love us and pour out His grace into our hearts, to transform us so that we become the new people He wants us to be. We are drawn to this risen Lord; the Spirit draws us to Jesus; we see His endless love and power at work for us.

3. Jesus lifted up when the gospel is preached – this is where Jesus' mission shapes our mission. The Church's mission in the world is to 'lift up Jesus', to honour Jesus, to bring glory to Jesus. When I preach a sermon telling you how good and great Jesus is and how wonderful a Saviour He is, then Jesus is lifted up all over again. When we tell a neighbour how much Jesus means to us and tell one of the stories of Jesus healing or helping someone, then Jesus is lifted up all over again. When we love someone and help someone in need as a Christian, when we pray for someone we know, when we serve the community in some way as an expression of our desire to serve, when we live our life in the way Jesus teaches – then in all of these ways Jesus is lifted up all over again. Our mission in the world, as Church together or individually, is to glorify Jesus, to lift Him up. We do that by our words, by our attitudes and by our lifestyle. As God's mission was to send Jesus to the world, as Jesus' mission was to die on the cross, the Church's mission is to tell the world about Jesus and show the world what Jesus is like, so that others will be drawn to Jesus and believe in Him.

The communion service lifts Jesus up all over again. This service is all about Him. The bread and wine are all about His death; they remind us that at the heart of salvation stands the Jesus whose very reason for coming was to give His life. We are drawn to Him all over again. He is the Saviour in whom we have forgiveness, peace, hope and life to full. He is a Saviour who really saves! We are drawn to Him so that we might love Him with an undying love; we are drawn to Him that our faith will be stronger; we are drawn to Him so that we might follow Him more closely and learn to be like Him; we are drawn to Him so that we become inspired to tell others about Him and how good He is. When you take the bread and the wine, think on Jesus; think how good He is, how loving; think how much we owe Him; think how we can love Him and serve others.

What is our mission in life? It is to lift Jesus up! The Church's mission together is to tell the community about Jesus; our mission individually is to live life in the way He wants and to tell our friends how good Jesus is. His mission was to come to the world to die; our mission is to tell the world about Him so that others believe. Here is the reality of the gospel: "*I when...*" (12:32)