

JOHN 10:7-18  
CORE TASK#4 – MISSION

What is the Church for? Does the Church have a purpose, a reason for being? For some people looking at the Church today from outside, this is a real question; they are not sure that the Church is relevant to life any more and so begin to ask 'What is the Church for?' They struggle to find an answer! The Church just doesn't seem to be relevant to their lives; it doesn't deal with the issues that are bothering them; or at least that's how it seems to them. I would suggest that the Church is better at dealing with big issues than some people assume, but that's a different matter for now. This is also a question that those inside the Church are not very good at answering; Church just is! Church is there and always has been there and we've just assumed that the Church will always be there, but sometimes we're not very good at articulating what the Church is for because we've never really thought about it!

We have 5 Core Tasks in our Church, priorities that we see as important. In 2001 we recognised that these are tasks core to the Church's work; Worship, Nurture, Service, Mission, Prayer. In a sense each of these is an answer in itself to what the Church is for. We've said already that worship is something we offer to God and in which we all take part. Nurture is about growing: nurturing relationships with one another, being more mature as Christians and growing in our faith. Last week, we said that service is shaped by Jesus: He demonstrated His love by washing His friends' feet and then by dying on the cross and He gave us an example of service to copy; so the attitude of service that should infuse the Church is cross-shaped, willing to lay down our lives for our friends. These sermons are on the Church website and in the library in print. Today we come to mission.

Mission is something God does! God has a mission; God is on a mission. Because God has a mission, the Church has mission too! We'll see what that is in a moment. I did a whole series of sermons on the theme of mission at the beginning of this year and these are all still on the website; the great temptation is to try to repeat in this sermon all that was said before, but I can't do that and won't, otherwise you'd be here till teatime! The whole Bible story is all about God's mission to bless the world and the real challenge for us as Church is to make sure that everything we do plays its part in God's mission in our place. We do run events to which we give the name mission: our children's summer mission, and overseas mission partners for whom we pray. The real challenge that we face is to see everything we do as part of our mission in our communities.

From the very beginning, God's mission has been to bless the world. He has all kinds of gifts and graces that He has planned to give the world; there are all sorts of promises He has made to people, nations, individuals, that show His mission. Sadly, many times the world has turned away, saying 'we don't want to know!' The centrepiece of that mission to bless the world is Jesus; Jesus came from God to continue and complete the work begun hundreds of years before and came to be a blessing to the world all over again; this was not some random event in the calendar, but is part of God's big picture, God's big plan to bless the world forever. The mission of the Church is to continue God's mission; we are here to be a blessing to the world in name of Jesus; again, sadly we have not always seen that or done that, but instead the Church has served our own interests, and done our own things in our own way and God's mission has been sidelined.

In John 10 we read some very famous words of Jesus that tell us why He came; this is Jesus' mission in the world. These words come against the background of leaders who have not been very good leaders, who have been more concerned for their own

welfare and prosperity than the welfare of the people they are supposed to be leading. They are seen as the hired hand who runs away and the thief who steals. The shepherd has always been a Bible picture of leadership – God is the shepherd, the kings and priests are seen as shepherds; Jesus is the good shepherd. Jesus tells us why He came: “*The thief...*” (v10) ‘Life’ is the reason for Jesus’ coming, to give life in the fullest, best and biggest sense to people who will listen to Him and believe. ‘Life’ must mean more than physically living and breathing; for Jesus life is a huge gift; so often in John’s gospel, Jesus says that He is ‘the life!’ Life is about relationship with God through faith, is about life filled with the gifts and graces of God, hope, peace, forgiveness; this gift of life is untouched by death and goes on forever in the presence of God. Jesus came to give this gift of life to the world in new way, to people like us and to give this gift of life in abundance. This is why He came!

There is a paradox in the gospel: “*I am...*” (v11) Jesus came to give life to the world and the paradox of the gospel is that He does that by dying on the cross. Jesus brings life to the world in His death. His death was not some tragic accident that was a waste of a good young life; His death was the very reason for His coming; He came with the express purpose of laying down His life on the cross for the sake of others, for our sake. When He died, He took away everything that stands in the way of this gift of life: He took away everything that brings despair, He took away the consequences of our faults and mistakes, He took away our enmity with God, He took away guilt and fear, and took away the fear and power of death itself. Death was not the end of the story for Jesus; the gospel doesn’t end at the cross; the gospel ends with resurrection and the new life in Jesus Himself and because He died and was raised, this gift of life is ours. God’s mission is to bless world in Jesus, to give life to the world in new way and He did this when Jesus died and rose again.

The Church’s mission is to help people discover life in Jesus. It is a very simple reason for being, to help people discover life in Christ for themselves. Our mission simply is to reflect Jesus to the world so that people discover Jesus for themselves and find in Him life in all its fullness. The Church is not an end in itself; our mission is not to advertise Church as the answer to life, but to point people to Jesus. God’s mission is to bless the world; Jesus came to give life in all its fullness; the Church is to be part of that mission, letting loose the blessing of God into our world; helping people discover life in all its fullness in Jesus. God is on a mission and we are His co-workers.

There are 3 ways in which we do this:

**1. the life we live** – Christians are called to be like Jesus; Jesus is the role model for life; we’ve talked before about the notion of role models and how people’s lives and attitudes are shaped by the people we admire; that’s why lots of young women try to be size 0, because they aspire to be like the models they see on the catwalks; the results can be catastrophic. A much more positive role model for life is Jesus, with His attitudes and His actions to copy in the way we live; as we do that, we reflect Jesus to the world around us; people see Christ in us and are drawn to find out why we live in the way we do. We play our part in God’s great mission to the world by following Jesus, listening to Him, learning from Him, shaping life by His teaching and example.

**2. the love we show** – it was said of the early Christians “see how these Christians love one another” and that became the magnet to draw people to the Church. As part of that love for one another, the early Church arranged to give food to the poor of their communities; some of the rich Christians sold property, houses and fields and used the proceeds to help others who were poor, and they did so in a spirit of love for one another; there was a real sense of Christians living together, being a community

together, belonging together, loving one another. We live in a society where that sense of community is disappearing; more and more people live on their own; we are becoming a more and more self-centred and selfish society; so a people who care for one another, who love one another, who have a sense of community with other people not their family, will again act as a magnet. People see the love we show and are drawn to Jesus.

**3. the stories we tell** – We are a “proclamation tribe” (Hirsch) There will always be a need to tell people about Jesus, to tell people stories about Jesus and what He is like and what He has done. Ultimately that is the only way in which people will fully and completely discover the gift of life that Jesus came to bring. Faith is born in our hearts when we hear the stories of Jesus and respond to what we hear; we admire the story, we admire Jesus, perhaps from a distance to begin with, but later more closely and eventually we come to the place where we make our declaration of faith. It is in telling the stories of Jesus that people begin to know and love Jesus and begin to discover the gift of life that He came to bring. The great challenge for all of us is to be able to tell these stories; this is not just the preacher’s job, but there is a need for all of us to be able to tell something of what we know and understand, over the garden fence, in the shop, with our family and friends. The gospel is for everyone to hear; the stories are for everyone; God’s mission is to include everyone in His blessing and the church’s task is to tell the world the stories of Jesus.

“Here is *The Story*, the grand universal narrative that stretches from creation to new creation, and accounts for everything in between. This is The Story that tells us where we have come from, how we got to be here, who we are, why the world is in the mess it is, how it can be (and has been) changed, and where we are ultimately going...God is the originator of the story, the teller of the story, the prime actor in the story, the planner and guide of the story’s plot, the meaning of the story and its ultimate completion. He is its beginning, end and centre.” (C Wright *The Mission of God* p533)

This is what the Bible is all about, God’s story, the story of God’s mission to bless the world. At the centre of that story is the huge person of Jesus; Jesus said “*I have...*” (v10) This is what the Church is for; this is the Church’s reason for being, to help people discover Jesus’ gift of life. Have you ever wondered what life is all about? Have you ever wanted answers to some of the big questions and big issues in life? The Church is the place to ask these questions. The Church is here to help people discover the answers to life’s big questions. James Denney, a Scottish preacher, theologian of early 20<sup>th</sup> century and on the wall of the vestry in his Church he had these words framed to see them every time he went to conduct a service; they are about the preacher, but they are also about the Church: “No man can bear witness to Christ and to himself at the same time. No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save.” The Church not in the business of showing the world that we are clever; Christians not in that business either; we are in the business of showing the world that Jesus is a great Saviour, life-giver. God’s mission is to bless the world; Jesus came to give life; our mission, as partners with God, is to help others discover the blessing of God and life in Christ.