

MATTHEW 21:1-11
MISSION DNA!

He's a man on a mission. He's a man who has something to achieve, something to get done. There is no doubt about that! There would be a look in His eye that tells anyone who sees Him that day that nothing would stand in the way of that mission; it will be achieved and He will complete the job that He has started. People watching Him that day saw one thing, but the mission He came to complete would be quite different. They saw someone strong and powerful; it was a triumphant day, albeit the donkey didn't quite ring true; but the mission in His mind was different and would end in a quite different way. "Ride on, ride on in majesty; in lowly pomp ride on to die!" (Hymn 365) Jesus' mission seemed as if it was to conquer the world, beginning in Jerusalem and to do that by the power and majesty of God. Jesus' real mission was to give His life on the cross to save the world from our sin.

Mission – the fourth thread in our Christian DNA. DNA is what makes us the people that we are; it shapes our bodies, our personalities; everything about us is shaped by our genetic DNA. I discovered the other day that our DNA has four building blocks that are arranged in all kinds of ways; there are all sorts of different combinations of these four blocks. In asking "what makes up the DNA of the Christian? Of the Church?" we have already seen three threads: "Jesus is Lord" and we said that we need to rediscover the place and importance of Jesus; 'grace' should shape the way we think about God, about ourselves and about other people; 'community' – being together, doing things together, being the people of God together, even with people with whom we find it hard to get along. The fourth thread is 'mission'; the Church has a reason to be, a purpose, a mission in the world; does the Christian have the same sense of purpose?

"It is not so much the case that God has a mission for His Church in the world, as that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission was not made for the Church; the Church was made for mission – God's mission. " (Chris Wright) Any way of thinking about mission has to start with God and with Jesus and with the sense of the mission that God has in the world. Our understanding of the mission on which we are, or might be, engaged begins with an understanding what God is doing in the world. The mission of God is to bless the nations of the world with everything we need for life; at the centre of that mission to bless the nations stands the figure of Jesus. Jesus came into the world to be a blessing to the world and He did that supremely by His death and resurrection. Our mission is to be a blessing to others in name of Jesus.

We're going to look at Palm Sunday more closely this evening, but for now: Palm Sunday is a key part of Jesus' mission. Here, He deliberately comes into Jerusalem in this public way, saying at least two things to the people watching. First of all, He says "I am your long-awaited King" – the whole 'donkey-thing' is a deliberate fulfilment of the old prophecy, quoted by Matthew: "Say to..." (*Matthew 21:5*) These words are all about kingship and the coming of a great King one day, the Messiah who would save His people and set them free. Jesus is declaring Himself that Messiah-King and the people saw it very clearly. Secondly, the people cry "*Blessed is...*" (*Matthew 21:9*) and in that cry they declare Jesus as God-given, the One sent by God into the world, quoting Psalm 118, which is all about the coming of salvation to Israel. So Jesus accepts the honour of being the God-given Messiah; the only difference was that He saw salvation as coming through the cross, His mission being fulfilled in service and sacrifice. Palm Sunday is part of this God-given mission, of the Messiah, the King, the Saviour!

Mission is a word that has been around Church for a long time. The 'Missionary' was the Christian who went overseas to convert the heathen! The Church was over here and the

world was over there and from time to time we'd organise a mission to these people so that we might convert them and bring them over here to live with us. We'd do door-to-door visitation and people would say "who are you and why are you here?" Then we'd complain when no-one was interested in our message and we'd ignore them as pagan until the next mission we'd organise! Christians would be so caught up in Church affairs that they had no time to meet their neighbours, or even to the neglect of their own families. Churches would arrange guest services for Christians to bring their non-Christian friends, but then discover they had none! This is a slight caricature, but not much! We need to think in a different way about mission; we need to think about our mission as God thought about His!

Alan Hirsch (*The Forgotten Ways*) has 4 'P's, by which he would describe Jesus' mission:

- **Presence** "In Jesus the eternal God is fully present to us." (Hirsch p.132) God came here to our world to live in the shape and form of Jesus. God living with us, amongst us, living in our neighbourhood, in our community.
- **Proximity** What stands out about Jesus for many people is that He is a friend to so many broken and lost people. He spends time with the tax collectors, men like Zaccheus; He understands the sick, the blind and their needs and He heals them. People could get to know Him and love Him and trust Him.
- **Powerlessness** Jesus becomes "one of us", a humble carpenter for 30 years in Galilee before embarking on His great ministry. Palm Sunday may seem as if Jesus is about power and kingship, but in fact the whole mission, even Palm Sunday, is about service and humility; "gentle..." (*Matthew 21:5*) By that powerlessness, service, humility and cross, Jesus changes the world, transforms us and people like us.
- **Proclamation** Jesus did herald the coming reign of God in the world; He called people to respond in repentance and faith; He taught people about big issues so that they could respond to God in the best way possible.

This is one way of understanding Jesus' mission in the world, a way that resonates clearly with the picture of Jesus in the gospels; He came to be God present in the world and, living in the world, He brought grace and salvation to the world in new way.

The Mission of the Christian, and of the Church, can be shaped by each of 4 P's, but they are mighty challenging:

Presence – Earlier we described a Church that lived behind fortress walls and only came out to make mission raids on the people who lived nearby. 'Presence' has a quite different feel to it. "There is a time to simply become part of the very fabric of a community and to engage in the humanity of it all." (Hirsch p.133) Relationships are so important in mission; people listen to us more willingly if they know us and when they get the impression from us that we like them! When they get the impression that we like them, then they'll get the impression that God likes them! It all begins with being part of the community, spending time with people who live on our street, or being involved with our families, and being involved in groups and organisations. How will the children and young people of our community hear the stories of Jesus – by the church being in the school! How will people in our community know who the Christians are – by us being there beside them! Presence is not the whole story by any means, but mission begins with presence.

Proximity - "The Church needs to be a caring place if it is to communicate the gospel." That is a quote from Ann Morisey which began the letter that we sent out with the Pastoral Care questionnaire. People knew that Jesus cared for them as people, that He was genuinely interested in their well-being. Are we interested in our neighbours to be interested in our neighbours, or are we only interested in their well-being as potential

converts? Are we Christians a caring people? Are we genuinely Interested in people for the sake of their well-being? That's how it should be! Being involved with people, genuinely interested in people – it speaks volume.

Powerlessness – the symbols of Christianity are... what? The cross – the symbol of Jesus' humility, suffering and service. The basin of water? Jesus as the servant who washed His friends' feet. I sometimes wonder if Christians and the Church have ever completely grasped this idea. What was mission in the Middle Ages? The Crusades! They were an attempt to create the Kingdom of God by force! It is a hardly a mission full of service and humility! Who is the most instantly recognisable Christian face of the 20th century? We could argue for Mother Teresa, famous for serving the children of Kolkata, not being a figure of power and might, but for her gentle, humble Christian service. The temptation has been to look for power, authority and control and Christians have not always resisted that temptation, either as individuals or an institution; the harder, but better way is to be committed to "servanthood and humility in our relationships with each other and world." (Hirsch p.134) So what if someone steps on our toes, or offends and hurts us; they crucified Jesus!

Proclamation – we are a "message tribe". We have a story to tell and we need to tell that story. It is great to be 'present' in the world, or interested, or servants; these will give us opportunities and will allow people to listen to us when we do speak. But there is one more thing: speak we must! We have to be willing to share the gospel story with people we meet, tell them something about Jesus and faith; what we're called to be and to do. We have a message that is precious, that changes people's lives, that has turned the world upside down and our mission is to pass that message on, to give it to others, to tell people. Do people know what the Church stands for? Is what they know shaped by what they see on TV? How will they know the real story of Jesus and faith? Only when we tell them!

"There's not much here about doing mission!" You might think that, but mission is so often about who we are, being the right kind of people, being in the right place at the right time, people willing to serve. Here's the thrill: "Right where you are, God is moving to draw and connect people in the depth, risk and reality of knowing Christ." (Hirsch p.136) This is true across the world: the Spirit of God is at work, drawing people to Jesus. It is true in our community: the Spirit of God is work, drawing people to Jesus. Sometimes that happens through us; sometimes it happens in spite of us. God is at work, doing His mission to bless the world. The question is: are we at our work, doing the mission of God in our community? What communities and networks of people are we involved in outside the Church? Are we genuinely interested in the well-being of other people, in Church and beyond? Are we committed to serve one another and others in a real spirit of humility? Are we ready and willing to tell someone something of the story of Jesus? Are we ready to sign up to this mission?

Our Christian DNA: "Jesus is Lord" – central to our life and faith is the person of Jesus. "Grace" – God loves us; we are loved; we should accept one another. "Community" – together we worship God and live the life of faith. "Mission" – be a blessing to others in the name of Jesus. Four threads of the DNA of the Christian and the Church; these should shape us, the kind of people we are, the kind of Church that we are. Will we be this people?