

21 March 2010

The Purpose Driven Life – Part 6 – Made for a Mission - Evangelism

Readings: Acts 20: 17-24 John 17: 6-19

Today we come to the last of the five purposes. **The four purposes** we've explored so far:

- The first purpose was **worship**. Worship is knowing and responding to God's love, by loving Him back. The Scottish Catechism asks the question "Why was I created". And gives the answer "I was created in order to worship God and to enjoy him forever". Worship, as I have said each week, is far far more than what we do in this building. Worship of God should be our whole life, 24/7/365.
- The second purpose was **fellowship** – learning to love one another, to live together in the family of God, that great multitude of believers with whom we'll share eternity.
- The third purpose was **discipleship** – learning to become like Christ. It takes an entire lifetime here on earth for God to build character in us, the character qualities of Jesus Christ. And as I have said before –when we die we take nothing with us – career, wealth, possessions – nothing except our character.
- The fourth purpose was **service** – learning to use our abilities to serve God. And the only way we can serve God is by serving others. We learn to use SHAPE, our Spiritual Gifts, our Heart, our Abilities, our Personality, and our Experiences for God in serving Him.

Question: what are the only two things that you can't do in heaven? You can't sin in heaven and you can't share the Good News of Jesus with unbelievers. The first four Purposes are transferable into our life in eternity. Worship of God; living in fellowship with God's family; being like Christ; serving God. But the fifth purpose of your life – '**You were made for mission**' - is only in this earthly life. It is in preparation for our life together in eternity.

Our fifth Purpose: You were made for mission. Jesus says in John 17 v 18 "*In the same way that you gave Me a mission in the world, I give them a mission to the world.*" Last week we talked about how you need a ministry in the church - we serve God by serving one another. This week we learn that we also need to share the Gospel with others; you also need a mission in the world. You need a ministry to believers – that is serving and helping one another as members of the Body of Christ - and you need a mission to unbelievers. Mission is sharing the Good News of the Kingdom with unbelievers.

In John 20:21, Jesus said, *"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* Sent to do what? What is our mission? Paul tells us in Acts 20:24 *"the most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work the Lord Jesus gave me to tell people the good news about God's grace."* We share the Good News with others because this is something our Lord commanded us to do. If we disobey this command of Jesus the family of God on earth would soon cease to exist. If we claim to be His disciples, then we must go as Jesus commands, to share the Gospel. It has been said, "God doesn't command sinners to go to church, but he does command the church to go to sinners."

So the fifth purpose of our lives is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Everything we've shared during this 40 Days of Purpose has led us to this point. Once we have discovered what God has done for us, then it is something we must want to share with others.

This leads us to another misunderstood word. (Remember, we have 'redefined' worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry). The word is '**evangelism**'. This is often portrayed as the 'hard sell' for God which makes people dive for cover. Beat people over the head with the Bible. Be so crass in your approach everyone cringes. A man got into a railway compartment, and asked 'does anyone here know Jesus Christ?' He got a typical British response – heads lowered, maybe a dismissive shake. 'Oh – then I'd better sit down and tell you about him'. But the word 'evangelism' comes from the Greek word meaning Gospel, or Good News. The Bible teaches us to share the Good News of Jesus. To evangelise.

When we look at Acts we discover what is meant by evangelism. Acts 1: 8: *"You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* A witness is somebody who tells what they have seen, who tells what happened to them. Nobody can be a better witness of what God has done in your life than you. So God says, "I just want you to tell other people what's happened to you, what's happened in your life."

Witness in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was where they were when Jesus spoke. So he is saying that we start our mission at home. He wants us to witness his grace with the people closest to us in 'our' Jerusalem. Our own home town. Billingshurst. To our family, to our friends, to our colleagues at work, and to our local community.

Then he says I want you to go *'to Judea'* – that is like the country next door – and *'Samaria'*. Samaritans happen to be different culturally and racially and, as we see elsewhere in the Bible, were hated by the Jews. In other words, Jesus was telling us to go to even those people who are different from us, who are 'beyond the pale'. Then Jesus says I want you *'to go to the ends of the earth.'* Global.

Jesus wants us to be **witnesses** of the Good News he came to share with us. Once we've discovered the Good News for ourselves, then it is something we want to pass on to others.

I heard this story from Jamie Houghton, who will soon share with me in Christina and Ben's wedding:

"A man was once flying from Atlanta to Dallas, and it so happened that in the seat next to him there was a little girl with Down's syndrome. After a while she turned to him and said, 'Do you smoke?' 'No,' he said, 'I don't smoke.'

'That's good,' she said, 'My mummy says you shouldn't smoke.' The she pointed to the businessman who was sitting on the other side of him and said, 'Does he smoke?' The man was naturally rather embarrassed by this, but he thought he ought to humour her, so he asked the businessman sitting next to him, 'Excuse me, but do you smoke?' 'No,' he said. 'That's good,' said the girl.

There was a bit of a pause, and then a few minutes later the little girl said, 'Do you love Jesus?' 'Yes,' the man replied, 'As a matter of fact I do love Jesus.'

'That's good,' she said. 'Everybody should love Jesus.' And then it suddenly dawned on him what she was going to say next. And he hunched down in his seat and hoped against hope that she wouldn't. But she did. 'That man next to you,' she said, 'does he love Jesus?' So he swallowed hard, and turned to the businessman sitting next to him and asked him.

And with a tear in his eye the man replied, 'Do you know, I've been wanting someone to ask me that for a long time.'

And so Milton Cunningham, who was a preacher on his way to speak at a seminary in Dallas, led that businessman to Christ there on that plane, all thanks to a little girl's utter lack of self-consciousness."

There are three ways I must share my mission in line with what is said in Acts 1 v 9

First, I must share the Good News with those in My World. That's the starting point of mission. Remember the story of the man - named 'Legion', because many demons had entered him? Jesus cast them out, and gave them permission to enter a herd of swine who promptly rushed into the sea. Jesus then said to him: *"Go back home and tell the people how much God has done for you."* So the man went all over town telling how much Jesus had done for him." (Luke 8 v 39)

Jesus tells the man *“to go back home”* and share what God has done for him. That’s where mission begins. Luke says the man couldn’t keep quiet. *“He went all over the town”* sharing his story with everyone who would listen to him. They knew he was the disturbed man who had lived in the tombs. Just by showing his new life to them this was an incredible witness to the grace of God that had worked in his life.

That’s what God wants of us. We may not have been as disturbed as Legion was. We may not have a dramatic, eye-catching story. But we all have experienced his love for us and a change of life once we turned to Christ. It shows. That is our witness that we have to share with those around us.

You may well believe the myth that people aren't interested in spiritual issues, but nothing could be further from the truth. Like the businessman on the plane, many people are longing to hear about God’s purpose for their life. With a General Election looming, we are hearing more of Opinion Polls. I was almost staggered to read that every single poll and every single survey says Americans are more interested in spiritual things now than they were ten years ago. Not less, but more interested in spiritual issues. A recent Gallup survey discovered that 65 million Americans have no church home, but 34 million of them said they would attend if somebody would just invite them. 34 million just waiting for an invitation! Over half! Another Gallup poll said teens would rather talk about God than sex, drugs or music. I have to ask what teens is the Pollster talking to? But that’s what Gallup found out in his survey, that teens are interested in talking about God.

Opportunities to share the Good News really are all around you. They are staring you in the face every single day. You just have to be ready for them. Many people have a vague spiritual awareness but it needs to be opened up into a living faith in Jesus. It is by witnessing what Jesus has done for us that’s so attractive to unbelievers. This has nothing to do with churches and perceived religion – it has everything to do with a living faith that is there for all to see. The story – yet again – of the family in my last church who came to faith because the mother saw something in the face of another mother at the school gate, and had the courage to ask ‘what is it about you?’

As it says in 1 Peter 3 v 15, *“Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you.”*

All of us can be ready to *“explain”* the Good News to anyone who asks. It’s not about being deeply theological. Rather, it’s sharing that simple practical faith that we share together in Christ Jesus. Until everyone comes to love Jesus for themselves there will always be a need for mission. It’s been asked since the time of Christ why, once we believe and are in God’s family, we can’t just

depart this life and be with God in heaven. Paul raised this quandary in Philippians 1: 23 when he said he'd far rather depart and be with Christ. But as Paul realised, there is a job on earth to be done. To go back to the question I posed earlier, there are only two things you can't do in heaven. One of them is sin and the other is tell people who don't know it the Good News about God's love. Now, which of those two reasons do you think you're still alive for?

God wants you to share the good news, to evangelise people who haven't heard. If somebody hadn't shared it with you, you'd be lost. So God wants you to pass it on. Look at the next verse. 2 Peter 3:9, "*God doesn't want anyone to be lost, but He wants all people to change their hearts and lives!*" God is not willing that any should perish. And as long as there's one person on earth who doesn't know the Good News, God says we've got to keep reaching out. Soon we'll focus very much on the cross, as we come to Good Friday and Easter. And Jesus on the cross is a vivid image, a vivid reminder, of his love where his outstretched arms declare "This is how much I love the people who you work with. This is how much I love your relatives who don't know the Christ yet. This is how much I love the people in your street. This much!"

I honestly look forward to having a problem of too many people wanting to come together in this building than we have space for. Our total Church membership is – what? 250? How big is this village? 8,000 or more? Heaven is big enough for them all – we simply have to take forward the command of Jesus, and tell everyone of God's grace.

Secondly, in our mission, we must dare to reach beyond our world.

Love demands that we move beyond what is safe and share the Good News with people who have a different culture and values from our own.

Paul writes, "*Whatever a person is like, I try to find a common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him.*" (1 Corinthians 9: 22)

Christians are called to reach out to others and build bridges and not walls. One of the words Jesus used for mission was the word '**Go**'. You can't spell "God" without "go." You can't spell "Good News" without "go." You can't spell "gospel" without "go." You have to go!

I must dare to reach beyond my world. Look at this next verse, Galatians 6:2, "*Stoop down and reach out to those who were oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law.*" What is Christ's law? Love your neighbour as yourself. You don't have to leave Billingshurst to do this. God says our actions are proved by our love. James 1: 27: "*Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: reach out to the homeless and the loveless in their plight.*" Jesus always rooted for the underdog that people in that society wanted to ignore: Matthew 25: 35-

36 *"I was hungry, and you fed Me. I was thirsty and you gave Me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited Me into your home. I was naked, and you gave Me clothing. I was sick and you cared for Me. I was in prison and you visited Me."* Jesus 'hung out' with the powerless, the poor, the widowed, the aged, the mentally ill, the social outcasts, sick, the lepers. If Jesus was walking the streets of Billingshurst today, I imagine He would be hanging out in Jengers Mead and at the railway station.

Frances and I have friends whose daughter is now a missionary in South Africa, working primarily on University Campuses, especially the University of Cape Town. She and her husband wrote: "Roshni (an Indian girl) was walking outside the Student Residences when she met Sindi, a fellow student. Despite being drunk she said to Roshni, "I don't want to be drunk every night, but then I don't know how to change...". Roshni shared with her about Jesus, the One who can set her free. That night Sindi gave her life to Jesus.

"After Roshni prayed for her she said it was like speaking to a different person. This was just one of many encounters during our campus mission where hundreds of students have come to find church family and many students have come to know Jesus as a saviour and friend."

Maybe we could be more active here in St Mary's in our support of our Students at University. I praise God that we have a system to keep in touch during term, and to bring them together in the holidays – but how about each House Group 'adopting' a student? Writing, maybe visiting, and most certainly praying.

In St Mary's we support a number of Missions: Barnabas Fund (supporting the persecuted church); Bible Society; Christian Blind Mission – where Peter Hall's parents work in Tanzania; CMS; Leprosy Mission: MAF: USPG; CPAS; Home Evangelism (Tim Hill); Church Army (I hope we'll have a CA preacher in May or June) – the list goes on. But what more can we do, to support them, to pray, to provide, even to visit and encourage?

To turn outward in mission is scary, even costly, but in Mark 10: 29 Jesus gives us an amazing promise. *Jesus replied, "Let me assure you that no one has ever given up anything ... for love of Me and to tell others the Good News, who won't be given back hundred times over."*

In the world out there, interest rates are at an historic low, especially on savings. Often less than 1%. Jesus is quoting the return on investment in His mission. Do you know what a hundred times over is? That's 10,000% interest on your investment! You're not going to get those rates of return anywhere in the world. That's how much God blesses the mission he called to you to do. And – so

you hear it from me very publicly – this is why I will not entertain any suggestion to cut our charitable giving.

3. In my mission I must care about the whole world.

If you are going to be like Jesus Christ, we need to care not only for Billingshurst, not only for our neighbours that are different from us, but also we need to care for ‘the whole world’. This concern for the whole world is reflected in the Great Commission Jesus gave to his disciples after His resurrection. Jesus said to his followers *“Go everywhere in the world, and tell the Good News to everyone.”* (Mark 16: 15)

The command of Jesus is so straight-forward and yet, so often, we do not take it to heart as Jesus would have us do. Jesus wants everyone in the whole wide world to hear the Good News of the Kingdom, and the only way that they will hear it, is when we are to make the sacrifices necessary to take it to them.

We are all commanded by Jesus to go ‘everywhere’ to share the Good News with everyone. Obviously, for most of the time our circumstances will mean that we can only witness the Good News to those around us in our home environment. But at other times in our lives, we may be able to seize an opportunity to go further. Shortly before I came here, I was invited to lead a Pilgrimage to Holy Russia. A member of my home church booked to come – not so much to visit the traditional sites of faith in Russia, but to seize the opportunity to share the Good News. Her bag was laden with literature, even Bibles, in Russian. She also spent time with Russian Christians to encourage them.

Jesus said, *“If you insist on saving your life, you will lose it. Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live.”*(Mark 8: 35)

If we’re prepared to share the Good News we will know what it means to ‘really live.’ ‘Really living’ isn’t life in the fast lane, it isn’t about having everything, it isn’t exotic holidays – it’s going where God sends us to share the Good News of the kingdom. This is because the sharing of the Good News is about relationships. Meeting real people, where they are, and making the difference in their lives.

When you get to heaven, is anybody going to be there because you told them, you shared, the Good News? In the Simulcast, Rick Warren says that in the next 365 days, 2.4 million Americans will die, and most of them will go into eternity without Jesus Christ. In the next 365 days, 54 million

people in the world will die; most of them will go into eternity without Jesus Christ. If we care, we must share.

Paul, speaking in the Synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia, said "*David served God's purposes in his own time.*" (Acts 13: 36). As we come to the close of 40 days, the challenge to us all is: will you serve God's purpose in your generation, in your time? What is more important than doing what God put you on earth to do? Until we die, our work, our mission, is not complete. So as we close, you've got four possible responses. You can say like Moses, "Who me?" Or you can say like Jonah, "Not me." Or you can say it like Habakkuk, "Why me?" Or you can say like Isaiah, "Send me." The most dangerous prayer you can pray is "God use me."

God's fifth purpose for our lives is that all of us are called to mission. Psalm 67: 2 "*Send us around the world with the news of Your saving power and Your eternal plan for all mankind.*"

Let's bow our heads.

Father, thank you for the privilege of being invited to be a part of the greatest cause, the building of your family and to be a history maker. Help each of us to fulfil the purposes you made us for. So today, I accept this fifth purpose, my mission to tell others. I want you to use me at any time, in any way, in any place. I want to bring others into relationship with you. I want to serve your purpose in my generation. And I want to be a part of what you're doing in the world. Help me to reach one more for Jesus. In your name I pray. Amen."

Brian Pritchard

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