

Marks of Mission

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Fourth Sunday after Pentecost 2022 II Kings 5:1-14, Psalm 30, Galatians 6:7 – 18,, Luke 10:1 – 12, 17 – 24

“Cure the sick who are there, and say to them ‘The Kingdom of God has come near’” (Luke 10:9)

One of the buzz words of the Church today is that we should all be involved in Mission Action Planning, and last month your Parish Council spent some time putting together some preliminary ideas about such a plan for this parish. The Anglican Consultative Council has identified five “Marks” of mission for the Anglican Communion –

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

These marks may give a wider picture of “mission” than we have traditionally used, but each depends on the others for completeness. Our Mission Action Plan is to be aligned to these “marks”, and the whole congregation will have the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of this Plan, as well as being responsible for its implementation!

We noted last Sunday that Jesus had earlier sent the twelve apostles on his mission, and now, after their return, as Jesus’ face is “set to go to Jerusalem”, he expands the mission work-force to involve “seventy others”. Some have seen this expansion to such a large number of “missioners”, as

a sign that mission is the responsibility of the widest possible group of Jesus' followers. The whole congregation perhaps? What do his instructions to the Seventy suggest about *our* responsibility?

First, it seems, we are to be bearers of a message of peace: "first say 'peace to this house!'" "Peace", for those who schooled in the Hebrew language, was a greeting that carried with it a richness which is much deeper than the absence of warfare – *shalom* meant more a total well-being, with everything in its proper place, and a fulness of life. Our mission, Jesus' mission, always has that as its primary characteristic – we want everyone to enjoy this richness of peace, and to have that fullness of life that Jesus came to bring.

Then there is an interesting little sidelight there about justice – "eating and drinking whatever they provide, *for the labourer deserves to be paid*". This refers not only to our responsibility to provide for suitable living arrangements for people like our parish priests, but also the wider responsibility for ensuring that there is a just recompense for all who work. The present cost of living concern in our society makes the question of what workers are paid an urgent issue for our community and its leaders to wrestle with.

But there's the other side of that clause, too: the missionaries are to be "*eating and drinking whatever they provide*". There is a responsibility of the guest towards the hosts, the responsibility of identifying with the *hosts'* culture, and not imposing foreign values on them. One of the most encouraging aspects of much of the Church's mission today is that it tries to value the culture of those to whom it takes the good news of Jesus, not forcing people to abandon their culture and ways (language even!) to conform to foreign customs before they become Christians. Those photos of aboriginal children on mission stations dressed in western clothes and forbidden to use their own language, still makes me profoundly

uncomfortable!

One of the qualities valued by those who follow a Benedictine spirituality, is Stability. This has its basis in the instruction Jesus gives his missionaries, "Remain in the same house...do not move about from house to house". This can speak to us in two directions: the first is about the *base* for mission. This parish has been the base for mission for generations of people who have called it "home". One of the principal tasks of the parish is to provide a stable basis for people to continue the mission of Christ's disciples. We need to remember that stability, and to ensure that the parish provides a consistent encouragement to all its members to continue in mission. That consistency is greatly strengthened by our regular attendance at worship and other activities. The whole "two by two" direction to missionaries speaks of this mutual encouragement that Jesus saw as fundamental to the task.

The stability works in the other direction as well – in the "targets" of our mission. Mission requires a commitment and a perseverance with those to whom we take the good news of Jesus. No flitting about from target to target!

When we listen to Jesus' instruction to his missionaries in the context of our "Healing Sunday" service, of course we will focus on the "cure the sick who are there" direction. Our care in prayer and loving concern for our sisters and brothers who are dis-eased in any way is fundamental to our mission. Sometimes we will see improvements in the physical, mental, or spiritual well-being of those whose cure we are seeking, and perhaps there should be more prominence given to our thanksgiving for these improvements. I like to think of us wanting our friends to experience "wholeness" – after all, that is the word that first became "hale" (as in "hale and hearty"), and then became "healthy". Such wholeness (health) has physical, mental and spiritual aspects to its description of a person's complete well-being, and any move closer to such

wholeness can be seen as “healing” and greeted with thanksgiving.

But notice the twice-repeated “the kingdom of God has come near” message that accompanies the curing of the sick who are there. For the mission that we are involved in is all about the kingdom of God, and the later section of the long Gospel reading today sets out that wider context most clearly. Jesus’ prayer “I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent, and revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.” For the Mission that we are planning into action is not *our* mission – it is God’s mission, and God graciously reveals to us, infants that we are in so many ways, what this mission is, and how we might co-operate with God in it. God bless us in our Mission Action Planning, and in our pursuit of that mission