

These articles have been written to encourage Christian people in thinking around the person-to-person, sharing-the-gospel aspect of mission. The idea is to read the article and discuss, or think about, the Bible references and questions supplied. The italicised quotes below and throughout come from a lecture by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. The full lecture is well-worth reading and discussing further. It can be found at:

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5515/revolutionary-love-archbishop-justins-lecture-on-evangelism>

John West.

I want to start by saying just two simple sentences about the church. First, the church exists to worship God in Jesus Christ. Second, the Church exists to make new disciples of Jesus Christ. Everything else is decoration. Some of it may be very necessary, useful, or wonderful decoration – but it's decoration.

Our motive driving this priority for the Church is not, not, not – never, never, never – that numbers are looking fairly low and the future is looking fairly bleak. Never. This is not a survival strategy.

John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople who died in 407AD, said ... “Nothing is more deadly than a Christian who is in-different to the salvation of others. Indeed I wonder if such a person can be a true Christian. To become a disciple of Christ is to obey his law of love; and obedience to the law brings joy beyond measure and description. Love means to want the best for others, sharing with them the joy of love. So the Christian feels compelled to speak to others about the law of love, and the joy of obeying this law. Of course, many people are shy about speaking to others; in their case actions motivated by love will be a most eloquent testimony. But those who are not shy will surely want to express their joy at every opportunity. There is no need to use fine words or elegant phrases.”

The old adage is attributed to St Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel at all times, where necessary use words.” Lay it aside, put it down, forget it. Don't even think about it. Mainly for the reasons that he almost certainly didn't say it, and even if he did, he was wrong. As T.S. Eliot's character Sweeney said: “I gotta use words when I talk to you.”

But in order to know how to speak and proclaim, we must listen and converse. We are those who have listened to the Gospel, and our reception of the Good News has formed us.

Why not talk of ‘mission’? It's so much more inclusive and encompassing, and something we are all, me included, passionate about. That was my reason for steering away from it. I have nothing against mission – quite the reverse: the recent renewal of the Church's appropriation of the term has been heartening. But such is the widespread use of the term that my sense of this talk being committed to mission would be to say that I was committed to everything.

this sort of thing. Over time you might build a discipling team who can be trained and introduced to new resources.

Acts 2:40-47

2 Timothy 1:13, 3:14-16

Luke 11:1

- Can you identify people in your church who might benefit from a Beginners' Group, particularly if it was badged as a “Refresher Course”?
- What sort of things do young Christians need to know and be encouraged with?
- What resources are you aware of that can help with this?
- In the business of sharing the Good News about Jesus, what sort of help might you need, personally?
- What sort of help might you need to grow in your own Christian life?
- What do you think the Archbishop means by “continual conversion” and what difference might it make?



SIX

Next Steps

Mission:

Apparently one of the things that Billy Graham used to worry about was, what happened afterwards to the thousands of people who “came down to the front” to commit their lives to Christ.

This concern led to the organisation developing new resources and ways of following up new converts, to ensure that they had every opportunity to grow in their faith.

If we are to be intentional about “seeking to inspire transformation of life through faith in Jesus Christ” then we will want to plan the next steps to cater for Christian who are new to the faith or who still consider themselves to be beginners in the faith.

My experience seems to indicate that all Christians grow more rapidly in their faith when they join a small group which engages in prayer and Bible study. Such groups also provide pastoral care to their members. Starting a beginners’ group may be one way of helping people to develop.

But sometimes you may have just one person who needs help, you may not have the resources to run an extra group, or the new Christian may not feel confident enough to join a group.

An alternative then could be to identify mature Christians in the congregation who would be prepared take on one-to-one mentoring roles, discipling one or two new Christians at a time for whatever time it takes to bring them up to a level of confidence to join a larger group.

There are abundant resources at various levels available to do

ONE

Mission?

What is The

It is almost impossible to do mission without knowing what the mission is. We can describe it so broadly that it includes anything and everything we do as church, but that isn’t very helpful and it certainly doesn’t encourage us to do anything different from what we are already doing.

I suspect that for many of us “Mission” means reaching people in order to grow the local church, while for others it would be all the good things we do for people, arising out of our Christian faith. In other words, we proclaim the gospel (the good news about Jesus) in word and deed.

My observation is that churches are generally pretty good at the “deed” or “doing” part of mission. We know how to be helpful, we support good causes and we try to be a good influence in the communities we serve.

The “word” part of mission tends to be much more daunting. Sometimes we are not sure what to say. We know we have a faith in Jesus Christ but explaining it is something else! Sometimes, when it comes to explaining what we believe, we find it difficult to agree on the essentials. In addition we can be put off by words like “evangelism,” “being saved” or “being born again.”

And yet having conversations about our faith are important if we ever want to explain to someone we care about, what we are about and how they can become a Christian, rather than just letting them guess from our good behaviour.

Let me suggest then that our ultimate mission (and the part we find most hard) is not to bring people to church (good though that is) but to introduce people to the person of Jesus Christ.

Our Diocesan Mission Statement puts it very well:

We will encourage intentional and meaningful connections with the wider community, seeking to inspire transformation of life through faith in Jesus Christ.

If we love people then the good things we do and the connections we make will not only help people at a physical level but also open the door for us to communicate a life-changing faith in Jesus Christ. That is the mission (alongside the other general mission things we do) that I think we need to concentrate on. It's our weakest link, but it's not as hard as we may think. It isn't Mission Impossible.

Mark 1:14-15, 16-17

Matthew 28:18-20

Acts 1:8

Luke 8:38-44

**MISSION:
POSSIBLE**

- What do you learn about mission from the Bible references?
- How does your church engage in mission “in deed” and “in word”?
- How do you personally engage in mission?
- What aspects of mission do people find difficult?
- What might help to overcome these difficulties?

Evangelism is then a joyful proclamation of what has happened. It's the news of Jesus Christ. His life as the light breaking into this dark world for us. His death as the fount of our redemption. His resurrection as the hope of all. This news must be told, or how will people know?

Successful sharing of the Good News about Jesus doesn't have to lead to conversion. *Just having the conversation is a success in itself and can be a great joy!* And these success stories get people on board! Other Christians will listen and say, “Well that's not too threatening. I could do that!”

Sharing those stories in church gatherings does require perseverance however, if we are to change the way we think about our mission. So don't give up or let the practice peter out. Jesus' parables bear out that the growth of the Kingdom of God is sometimes barely seen, but in God's time it is sure to happen!

Acts 14:21-28

Acts 17:20-24

Acts 21:17-19

- Notice what the apostles report to other Christians.
- What could you or your church do to raise the profile and acceptance of talking about Jesus to unchurched people.
- Do you talk about Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit, prayer or the Scriptures with other Christians?
- What encourages or prevents you from doing so?



Each day the Gospel comes afresh to me as a sinner and astounds me with the news that I am loved, accepted, forgiven, redeemed and chosen in Jesus. We must open ourselves and the Church to the continual conversion which the Spirit works in us. The Church must continually be converted from the reduction of the Gospel into its fullness.

FIVE

Mission: Changing the Church Culture

Intentional conversations with people, who have not yet understood the Christian faith as a new way of life in a meaningful and fruitful relationship with God through Jesus Christ, are the bread and butter of churches that are seeing new growth rather than just transfer growth.

Can we then change our church culture so that this part of mission becomes the way we think? How might we raise the profile of Good-News-Sharing in our church life?

I don't think that I have all the answers by any means, but I do want to make a few suggestions:-

At some time during the worship service line up someone to tell the congregation about a conversation they had with someone else about Christianity and how good it was just to have the conversation.

Invite a person to briefly tell their own story of an encounter with God.

Invite the congregation to write up their most notable encounters with God and publish the accounts in a booklet, which in turn can be shared with others.

Ask your small groups to give opportunity, at the start of their meetings, to share such stories (especially about sharing the gospel with someone else).

Discuss the things which enable good and helpful conversations, and what to avoid.

Have a preaching and/or study series on Acts highlighting these mission aspects.

TWO

Mission: Back to the early days

"Establishment" churches such as the Anglican Church have historically been the backbone of society. We have engaged with the community, built schools, constructed nursing homes, visited the poor

and the sick and the elderly and generally ministered to the needs of people in our parish boundaries. Years ago it was assumed that most people in the parishes were Christian, and they probably were, at least in name. Today, in Western society, we are smaller and more marginalised. People increasingly don't know the Bible stories that everyone once knew and they often have a misinformed and skewed impression of the Christian Faith. Atheism is growing more antagonistic towards Christianity (in fact towards any form of religion). The Christian faith that we once thought everyone knew and understood, now needs careful explaining.

We are, in a sense back to New Testament times, where the Apostle Paul went out proclaiming Jesus Christ to Gentiles (those who had little or no knowledge of a Creator, nor of Judaism which laid the foundations for Christianity). So can we do it again? Can we explain the good news?

Let me suggest three steps...

We need to make *genuine* friendships with people who are not yet Christians.

When the opportunity arises we can share our own story of the difference Christ makes in our life.

With their permission we can explain to them how they too can know the transforming faith that we have found.

OK, so number one sounds easy enough. Number two is looking more difficult and number three sounds positively threat-

ening! You might be asking, “What would I say?”
And that is what we shall look at next...

1 Peter 3:15

Acts 26:1-29

Acts 17:16-34

- What do you learn about mission in the early church from the references?
- What differences can you see in Paul’s approach to sharing the gospel with King Agrippa (with a Jewish background) and the Athenians (with a Gentile background)?
- Can you recall conversations you may have had on Christian topics? What was it like?
- What is your own story? How did you come to faith in Jesus Christ? What does that mean to you today?

Something you might try: Approach a (not-yet-Christian) friend and ask if you can ask them some questions and record his/her answers. Ask such things as, Do you believe in God? What do you think makes a person a Christian? What do think is good about the church and what puts people off? Is there anything Christian churches could do to make them more attractive? ...and anything else you might really want to know. You don’t have to engage in any further discussion. Just listen and learn what people think. (A discussion may eventuate if your friend asks what you think. But whatever you do, don’t get sucked into an argument... ever! You might win the argument but you will almost always lose the person in the process.)

As a Christian it is my deepest conviction that in Jesus Christ, God comes to call every one He has made. Everyone has been summoned in Jesus Christ. For in Jesus Christ, God has poured out his love and his grace, his forgiveness and his mercy, his faithfulness. God would not be doing this without you or I. Evangelism is then a joyful proclamation of what has happened. It’s the news of Jesus Christ. His life as the light breaking into this dark world for us. His death as the fount of our redemption. His resurrection as the hope of all. This news must be told, or how will people know?

- Are there other parallels or parables you know of which might help people to understand God’s love for us and desire to forgive us and receive us into the Family (think about adoption for example).
- If you were to construct a prayer which someone might say in committing their life to Jesus Christ what would you put in it?
- What part does the Holy Spirit play in our conversations about the Good News. (Matthew 10:16-20)



*The institutional life of the Church must reflect, enable, promote and speak of the Good News.
How does our structural life reflect and empower our proclamation?
We must insist that all of our structures and committees, budgets (which are merely theology in numbers) and plans are appropriate to Jesus Christ, and the imperative to make him known.*

relationship with God is rather like a marriage. In fact the whole Bible (Old and New Testaments) make much of this analogy of God or Jesus being like the groom and the people of God being like the bride.

Now a marriage starts with a wedding, and the wedding has a formula, a set of vows or promises. "Will you take As your lawfully wedded...." "Will you love, honour, protect, keep... and so on"

This is then followed by vows recited line-by-line by the couple, to each other. That is the wedding, *but it isn't the marriage*. It's the declaration of intent, and it means that the couple are married, but the living it out is a lifetime of applying those vows in a relationship of love and faithfulness.

In a sense, that is what we do when we confirm that we want to receive God's Spirit, be forgiven for all the wrong we have done, and ask Jesus Christ to be in charge (the Lord) of our lives. The words of a prayer incorporating that idea are the words of intent. If we mean it then the Spirit will also help us to fulfil the commitment we make and to grow in our relationship with the God, who loves us and whose Son died for us. And yes we will want to explain that (Christ's death and resurrection) at some stage too. But for the time being just enjoy being in the family.

Acts 2:38

Acts 18:7

Acts 16:29-34

- What would you say to someone who asked you, "Well how do I become a Christian?"
- How would you explain some of these words in a way that makes sense to people today?
Saved; repent; turn to Christ; sin; eternal life; Kingdom of God.
- How much can you relate to the idea of a wedding/marriage being like a relationship with God/Jesus?

THREE

Mission: Being Intentional

Genuine friends share good ideas and good news, and there is no better news than Jesus Christ and the difference he makes in this life and for eternity. We

don't have to apologise for sharing the Good News. However, getting to a place where you can share that news without coming across as an American TV evangelist is the hard part!

Part of the good news is that you don't have to force the issue or be overbearing. If your friend doesn't want to talk about it, step back, but leave the door open with a comment like, "Well if you ever want to talk about it, I'm available." or "OK, perhaps some other time." If the conversation does seem to be getting a little heated (hopefully not from your side!) you could try pressing a little further by asking, "Can I ask you why talking about this makes you angry?"

When you tread carefully it may open up a whole conversation of opportunities to gently offer support and/or correct misunderstandings.

Not so long ago I was talking to a stranger over lunch, and he was telling me about all the difficulties he was having, so I eventually asked him something like this, "Do you ever pray when you are in difficulty? Do you believe in God? I come across a lot of people who are really helped when they pray."

If a positive conversation follows you might offer to pray with the person. In this case I gave him a couple of church brochures with contact details for prayer help. I haven't got to explaining the gospel yet, but it's a start.

At other times I have asked (when they find out I am involved in church), "Do you go to church yourself? What do

you think of it?” Keep asking questions, depending on the direction that the conversation takes. “What turned you off church? What caused you to drift away? Have you ever thought of coming back?” The thing is that I *genuinely want to know* what people think. It’s not just a ploy to manipulate the conversation onto the right track.

If you are feeling very brave and the conversation takes you far enough you might then ask, “What do you think makes a person a Christian? Would you like to know what the Bible says about it?”

Now here is a question for you. If he or she said, “Yes I would like to know what the Bible says about it,” what would you say next?

Acts 8:4-8

Acts 8:26-39

Acts 16:6-10

- What do learn about the intent of the Apostles when it came to the gospel?
- Share what happened with the “Something you might try” or talk about the way people seem to think (or not think!) about Christ.
- What are some of the misconceptions people have and how might you answer them in a way that doesn’t sound too “preachy”?
- What part should prayer take in sharing the Good News? What and when would you pray?

The Gospel is anything but formulaic.

Becky Pippert says: ‘evangelism is not memorising techniques to use on unsuspecting victims.’ Nor is it

an ‘inter-church competition – and yet we make it so. But it is God who does it.

The same Spirit who gives us speech enables the proclamation of the Gospel to be always fresh and always distinct. This is the Spirit who, as Eugene Peterson says, ‘always has an address’.

FOUR

Mission: Fear of Formulas

What *do* you say when a person finally asks the question, “What do I have to do to become a Christian?” Remember this may be the only chance you have to explain and you may not have a lot time to do it.

In the rush to get some sort of message across it can be very easy to use theological jargon: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” Now I know that Paul said that to the Philippian Jailor in Acts, but what does that mean to the average person today? We may be sceptical now of the “Sinner’s Prayer” from the times when the Billy Graham Crusades were in their heyday. We are wary of a formula that can amount to empty words, with no lasting meaning or effect.

We certainly should be careful to avoid jargon that has become meaningless to a new generation, but I also want to appeal to you not to be afraid of a formula or set prayer of repentance and affirmation of faith.

Let me put it this way: At baptism there is a formula, set statements or vows made by parents on behalf of their children. The first declaration is, “I turn to Christ.” The next, “I repent of my sins.” In those two statements lie the heart of the response that a person needs to make to become a child of God, a follower of Christ. Those two statements are made again when the person takes them as their own at Confirmation. If you want to introduce a person to Jesus Christ, one way is to explain those two statements and ask them if they want to make them *their* own.

Let me suggest another way of explaining the gospel: Our