

Pentecost 4 – 12th June 16

Readings: 1 Kings 21: 1-10, 15-21a; Psalm 5: 1-7; Galatians 2: 15 -21; Luke 7: 36-8:3

It's a great anniversary to be celebrating this morning – 157 years of worship and witness – so in the context of our anniversary this morning I want to spend a little time talking about mission. Now you've all heard of mission statements and statements of values and lists of key performance indicators without which no large corporation or government department seems to be complete these days. But the church too has its mission statements, and we in the Anglican Communion were early on the scene. It's just that we don't call it a mission statement – we call it the five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion, and here they are:

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

The Marks of Mission were developed by the Anglican Consultative Council between 1984 and 1990 and were affirmed at both the 1989 and 1999 Lambeth Conferences. They've been widely accepted around the Anglican Communion. They're not set in stone, in fact they were amended only quite recently when the fourth mark of mission was revised to its current wording – the words about challenging violence were added.

The first mark of mission, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom, is really a summary of what *all* mission is about, because it is based on Jesus' own summary of his mission. For example in Luke 4 *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,*

*because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*¹

Or in Luke 7: *And he answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.'*²

All mission is done in a particular setting or context. So, although there is a fundamental unity to the good news, it is shaped by the great diversity of places, times and cultures in which we live, proclaim and embody it. The Five Marks should not lead us to think that there are only five ways of doing mission! Our place and time is of course much different from 1st century Palestine. The Rev'ds Lizzie Gaitskell and Brenda Davis are chaplains at West Moreton Anglican College – and there the environment and culture of the school, which are quite

¹ Luke 4: 18-19

² Luke 7:22

different from St. Paul's – shape the mission, and in turn their ministry helps shape the environment and culture of the school. When I managed the Anglican Health Service in Papua New Guinea as a missionary with ABM, the environment, culture and context were different again. There, we were mainly directed and shaped by the third mark of mission. It's different again for us as we go out of the doors of this church to the mission field that awaits us there.

Mission is not an option for us. "*Mission goes out from God. Mission is God's way of loving and saving the world... So mission is never our invention or choice.*" (Lambeth Conference 1998, Section II p121). The initiative in mission is God's, not ours. We are called to serve God's mission and share in God's mission by living and proclaiming the good news.

An important feature of Anglicanism is our belief that worship is central to our common life. But worship is not just something we do alongside our witness to the good news: worship is itself a witness to the world. It is a sign that all of life is holy, that hope and meaning can be found in offering ourselves to God (cf. Romans 12:1). And each time we celebrate the Eucharist, we proclaim Christ's death and resurrection until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26). Our liturgical life is a vital dimension of our mission calling; and although it is not included per se in the Five Marks, it undergirds the forms of public witness listed there. Indeed, if we tried to engage in mission without it being undergirded by worship and prayer, we would fail utterly.

The Five Marks stress the *doing* of mission. Faithful action is the measure of our response to Christ (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; James 2:14-26). However, the challenge facing us all is not just to *do* mission but *to be a people of mission*. That is, mission is not just a task to be done by ourselves or by other on our behalf, but it is at the very core of our identity as Christians – as a people of God who, in our own context, are called to be a sign and an instrument of God's reign in Christ.

We can, I think, readily see that the first reading this morning from 1 Kings 21 is aligned with the fourth mark of mission. It's a story of a terrible injustice, just as starkly real today as it was then. There is little comfort, and much realism, in the words of 1 Kings 21. It describes the ability of the state, often motivated by powerful special interests, to obtain private property in a compulsory fashion. Even though the owner is compensated – and Ahab is seeking to compensate Naboth for his vineyard – the owner has little option but to acquiesce to the greater power of the state, in this case represented by Ahab. The problem in this passage is occasioned by how Ahab appropriates the property. He abdicates his leadership function, allowing Jezebel to achieve his goals, albeit by violent and unlawful means. Naboth refuses to sell and he is unjustly tried and executed. Both Ahab and Jezebel are equally guilty here and the Elijah, in an even-handed way condemns both them. King Ahab's passivity and failure to render justice is as evil in result and intent as Queen Jezebel's active pursuit of evil to achieve her ends, basically a nice view and a garden. Actions have consequences and Elijah warns Ahab that he will reap what he has sown. There is blood on his hands and eventually, as we read later in 1 Kings, he will be the victim of his own violence.

So as we consider this fourth mark of mission, we could reflect on these questions: Where do we see the powerful exploiting the powerless? Where do we see power – governmental or corporate – used to confiscate or sequester property for harmful ends or for its own ends? Just because an action is legal or that the legal system is employed to achieve a result does not necessarily imply that the action is moral or just or beneficial to the public good. Perhaps we

could think of the debate around Coal Seam Gas in these terms, or ways in which indigenous people were forced from their lands.

The account in St. Luke's Gospel of the woman with the alabaster jar is perhaps a familiar one. Luke says she was a sinner. We don't know the nature of this woman's "sinful" status. We should remember that sin, in first century Judaism, was seen as a social and religious disorder or condition – based often on birth, health, occupation – and not always a moral fault. We can too easily rush to judgment. The point of the story, of course, is the exercise of generosity and hospitality. Jesus embraces this generous woman and challenges the Pharisee's claim to superiority. Sure, the Pharisee offers hospitality to Jesus – but in the complex web of society then, exercise of hospitality, especially by someone like the Pharisee had strings attached – it was generally done to create a sense of obligation. So probably, the Pharisee invites Jesus to his house because he wants something. His sense of righteousness, or self-righteousness, blinds him to his own imperfection and his responsibility to provide hospitality to the woman, who he thinks can give him nothing in return. Jesus recognises unrestrained generosity – one of the values of the kingdom. Perhaps we can see a link to the first mark of mission, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom.

The kingdom that Jesus came to proclaim was, and is, no dreamy fantasy, but a place to be lived in here and now. He cared about real people, who were caught in real earthly human binds. We've heard over the last couple of Sundays about a soldier with a sick servant and a widow whose son has died. We hear today of a self-righteous middle ranking public official who looks down his nose at a woman who, not for the first time in all likelihood, is subject of speculation and innuendo about what kind of a woman she is. We hear of farmers sowing seed, of travellers being mugged, of a woman railing against injustice in the courts. Jesus gathered disciples and embraced the hungry, healed the sick, cast out demons, and invited ordinary people to walk with him. When he saw hunger, he offered bread. When the wine ran out, he made more. Rather than providing people with an escape route out of this world, he intruded into the human condition with all its tragedy and frailty, and its joy and celebration too and modelled a new way of living in this world – a way characterised by compassion, love, forgiveness, reconciliation, humility, acceptance of all. This was his mission, and it's ours too as we begin our 158th year of mission here at St. Paul's