

The five marks of mission 2

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

Last week we started a new 5 week exploration of the 5 Marks of Mission – not 5 men named Mark with a special job to do (!) but 5 tasks that Jesus undertook during his life on earth and which he has given to his Church to continue.

You will recall that they are:

- 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*

Today then, we are wanting to understand the second mark: to teach, baptise and nurture new believers.

I wonder how you became a Christian?

In times past many people in this country became Christians through growing up in a Christian family. Their parents and their parents before them were followers of Jesus, and they were brought up in an atmosphere of faith, bible reading and prayer; of church attendance.

Even as late as the 1950s the majority of children in this country attended Sunday school - even if only to give their parents an hour of peace and quiet on a Sunday afternoon... in all things God works for good!

Those who didn't leave childhood with an active faith often came to faith through an intellectual inquiry; through exploring the Christian faith rationally, deciding if it is true, and if they did, then making a commitment.

Nowadays, very few children are growing up in Christian homes. Their grandparents believed and belonged, their parents may have believed but gave up attending church, and they themselves have given up completely.

Increasingly, people who come to faith are doing so not through an intellectual inquiry, although that will be a part of the process.

Instead as they come into contact with a Christian community (church) and experience something of God through the people and their worship, they see that Christianity works and want it for themselves.

The truth is that no one is born a Christian.

Personally, I'm of the 'you're in to you opt out' school of thought about children.

All babies are made in the image of God, loved by him and in their own way have a relationship with him.

But like each baby must be taught and nurtured physically, intellectually, emotionally, so they must be taught and nurtured spiritually – to understand what it means to have a relationship with God through Jesus and accept it for themselves.

For some people this is an easy journey; for others it is hard and involves many twists and turns, steps backwards as well as forwards. Some enter into this relationship at a young age; for others it takes a lifetime.

But, as the old saying goes, the church is only ever one generation away from extinction.

Unless one generation teaches the next what it is to have a relationship with God through Jesus and nurtures the next generation to live a lively, adult Christian faith, then the church will very quickly cease to exist.

You will have noticed that the second mark of mission is to teach, *baptise* and nurture.

We are used in a 'Christian' society, where the expectation is that all children will grow up to be Christians is for infant baptism.

But as we move ever deeper as a society into a multi-cultural post-Christian society, then we will move ever further towards the model of the early church – of adults with no grounding in the faith being taught the Christian faith, and when they accept it for themselves being baptised both as a sign of their 'conversion' and as a means of receiving God's grace.

Baptism is not an optional extra in the process of evangelism but an integral part.

So, what are the implications of this second mark of mission for the church today?

At their ordination service, clergy are commissioned “to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, as agents of God's purposes of love. which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation”.

The good news of God’s kingdom and the invitation to join it never changes. But it must be articulated and shared in each generation in a way that resonates with where people are at.

Teaching, baptising and nurturing is really a job for the whole people of God. None of us can do it all on our own.

Excitingly we all have a role to play.

Lionel Messi might score the goal, but who was it who won the ball, who passed it upfield, who won the free kick?

As a benefice we have committed to making the most of evangelism to see people come to faith.

We have committed to help people grow as disciples of Christ, whatever their age or stage of life.

What part can you play in this?

From Ascension to Pentecost we will join in the Archbishop’s invitation to spend 11 days praying for God’s kingdom to come.

One request the archbishops have made is that each of us commits to praying for 5 other people to become Christians.

We can all do that can’t we?

But maybe we can think through what God has done in our lives so we are ready to share that with others...when appropriate.

Maybe we can invite others to church, or on the next Alpha course, or to our homegroup.

Maybe we could volunteer to help with church activities aimed at helping teach, baptise and nurture. The main reason we haven’t continued First Steps this term is because we don’t have enough manpower to staff it each week.

Maybe you could make the soup for Alpha?

Maybe you are poor in time but rich in money! Throw some money at the church and say please use it for evangelism.

As a Church of England church we are not only concerned with “our patch” but with our Diocese, our nation and the wider world.

The money we all moan about paying to the Diocese helps support churches in Medway and the deprived parts of SE London. Maybe we should be volunteering to give more!

And did you know that for £10 Open Doors, one of the mission organisations we support at St Martin’s will guarantee to put a bible in the hands of a Christian in North Korea, where getting hold of the Word of God is illegal and almost impossible.

The church is always just one generation from extinction.

But the church is always just one generation away from the conversion of the world.

With 2 billion Christians in the world we each only need to help 3 people come to faith and the whole world will have a relationship with God through Jesus. Now surely that’s something worth giving some attention to....