

Liturgy shaped Mission

In the name of the risen one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Thank you for the invitation to preach this morning. It is a great privilege to be here with you. I bring with me the ABM *Who is My Neighbour?* photographic exhibition. The exhibition highlights the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations in the Year 2000 and how Australian Aid is helping ABM's partners to respond to the serious situation of global poverty. The images come from Anglican Churches in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and tell the story of people and communities living on the front line of the struggle against poverty. There are five sets of the exhibition currently travelling around Australia to over 40 parishes in the months of May and June.

Today we find ourselves standing between the feast of the Ascension and Pentecost. The Acts reading refers explicitly to the Ascension. In it Jesus speaks about the promised Holy Spirit who will be with the disciples in his absence. He calls his disciples to be witnesses, witnesses to the face that in Jesus the kingdom of God is opened wide to all, not only to the religiously acceptable or to those considered "inside," but to male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free. This good news is the news Jesus was calling the disciples to proclaim.

Then we come to the Gospel of John. In the socio-historical context of John's Gospel there were small signs of disunity beginning to occur between believers. John writes for a community whose unity is threatened.

Today's passage sees Jesus facing betrayal and arrest. Immediately after he prays this prayer for his disciples he moves to the garden, where he is arrested. Despite the ominous context of the passage Jesus' concern is the unity of believers.

He asks that "they" may be one, as he and the Father are one. The unity Jesus prays for is multi-dimensional; it is unity among believers but also between God and believers. The source of the unity is not the believers themselves but the unity and love shared between the Father and the Son. The source of the unity does not depend on human beings but on divine love.

Today's lectionary readings give us a firm grounding for speaking about mission. Today I would like to focus on "Liturgy shaped Mission." When we think about what identifies us as Anglicans we find liturgy at the center. In this unifying liturgy we find inspiration for an understanding of mission.

The basic shape of Anglican liturgy is four-fold: Gathering in God's Name; Story-telling (or Ministry of the Word); Communion (Sacrament); and Sending (or going in the peace of Christ). So what does this all have to do with mission.

Let's look at each part of the liturgy more closely to find out:

Gathering

The first thing we do in Worship is acknowledge God, it is God that we come to worship. Likewise, mission is about God, and what God is doing in the world. Theologian Charles Wright said "it is not so much that God has a mission for his church in the world, but that God has a church for his mission in the world." The second thing about gathering in God's name is that it is corporate! We do this together. In a culture that focuses on the individual and his or her achievements, this is a radically countercultural act. In mission we are called to be community builders, to work in partnership, to embrace the other.

Storytelling (The Word)

The second part of our liturgy is story-telling – we hear the story of God's people throughout history and into the present. In the sermon and the prayers we hear the story of our contemporary world and we hold this world-story before God in prayer. In mission we are called to be hearers of the story of the world. We are also called to tell the story of the Christian Gospel in our actions, that is: 'good news to the poor and freedom to those held captive.'

Communion (The Sacrament)

Next we move toward the sacrament. Before we partake of the sacrament, the bread and the wine, we exclaim that "We are the body of Christ" and that God's spirit is with us. What a radical statement, to dare to claim to be the body of Christ. St Augustine said about the Eucharist: "I am your food, but instead of my being transformed into you, it is you who shall be transformed into me" (Mark O'Brien).

In the Eucharist we do not take God into ourselves but rather we are taken into the life of God: the One who created us, the One who redeemed us and the One who

gives us life. It is in our coming to the table, that we are continually converted into the Body of Christ, becoming bread for the world. In mission we take the wounded and resurrected Christ into the world, where we meet the wounded and resurrected Christ in others. As we have established, the mission we are involved in is God's mission, and it is always two-way.

Sending

Finally in the liturgy we are sent into the world God loves in peace. We are not sent into a world that is outside the love of God, but into a world that is deeply loved and valued by the divine. We are sent, in the words of theologian Stanley Hauerwas to help the world be the world. Just as we are called to be fully human, abiding in God, the world is called to be fully the world. In mission we go into the world God loves, acknowledging that this globe, with its various languages, colours and cultures is beloved of God. We are sent to find out what God is doing in the world and to join in, to use a sentiment of Rowan Williams. Finally we are not sent alone, we are sent in the power of the Holy Spirit to be the Body of Christ.

Obviously, this liturgy shaped mission is something we rehearse each Sunday, it is also something we grow into. We don't have it perfected and I don't foresee this happening in the near future, but we keep gathering, keep storytelling, keep communing, and keep going into the world God loves.

The liturgy continues as we go into the world, as Teresa of Avila affirms:

Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks Compassion on this world, Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, Yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours. (Teresa of Avila, 1515–1582)

Amen.

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