

2 Corinthians 4:13-15

GOD'S MISSION IN TODAY'S WORLD

What's your "Mission Statement"? We come across mission statements often these days, don't we? But when the meaning of words is over-inflated, their original meaning is lost. **"If everything is mission, nothing is mission."**

God's unique mission to our world began with the sending of His Son to redeem us. Jesus saw those He came to seek and to save, not just as sinners, but also as those sinned against. Our Lord gave us His mission agenda at the commencement of His ministry in Nazareth. **"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. ... Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4:18-19, 21)."**

Jesus is Himself the Good News that He has brought into our world. The messenger is the message. The life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ are good news of great joy for a world hungry for hope, and afraid of the future. We're living in a world of diminishing expectations for the future, a future desperately in need of a message that can give it a sure and indestructible hope. The Gospel is the light which salvation throws ahead of itself. Salvation runs ahead of itself and appears in the Gospel. The Gospel we're called to proclaim to our world isn't a utopian description of some far-off future. It is the daybreak of God's future in His grace-filled, forgiving Word. This Good News which is the heart and centre of all our mission activity within the Church, brings about what it declares. And why? **Because it is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe its saving message.**

Mission in the New Testament is like the fall-out from a vast explosion, a life-giving fall-out. One never ceases to be amazed at the enthusiasm and passion of the early Christians to tell about the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. They had been so overwhelmed by the abundance of grace given them in Jesus Christ, that the Gospel claimed every fibre of their beings, so much so that they would rather have given their lives for Christ's sake than deny Him.

St. Paul's enthusiasm to share the Gospel knew no limits. He spent five hours a day for two years in one locality, preaching and teaching the Gospel. All Paul did was motivated by his faith in our risen Redeemer, and the rock-solid reality of His resurrection. His buoyant faith in our Lord sustained his mission in the face of all the setbacks, persecution and opposition he experienced. The confidence with which St. Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ and Him crucified, was proof of the reality of his faith. All he did was other-centred: **"Everything is for your sake"**, Paul tells the Corinthians in this morning's text. Each new convert is evidence of the power of God's unmerited grace, and is cause for gratitude. The more people experience God's grace through the sacrament of Holy Baptism and the preaching of the Gospel, the greater God is thanked, praised and glorified.

The riches of God's glorious grace find expression in growing gratitude. We begin to see how amazing God's grace is, as we overflow in "songs of thankfulness and praise" to Him. The final purpose of mission is to increase the number of those who thank and worship the triune God. By thanking God, we participate in His glory. The glory of God is His people fully alive in thanksgiving for His grace and goodness. This weekend, we thank God that by means of modern technology – TV, DVDs, the Internet, and radio, more people than ever can hear of God's grace revealed so fully and abundantly in His Son, Jesus Christ. **"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9)."**

We read of how the early Christians were ravished by the Good News about Jesus Christ in the pages of God's Word: **"Very many of the disciples of that age, whose hearts had been ravished by the divine Word with a burning love of Christianity, first fulfilled the command of the Saviour and divided their goods among the needy. Then they set out on long journeys, doing the work of evangelists, eagerly striving to preach Christ to those who had never heard the Word of faith (Eusebius)."** The early Christians were incurable optimists. No amount of threats, persecution or imprisonment could deter their evangelistic endeavours. Theologians, like Herman Sasse, have warned us of the sin of pessimism. Pessimism is a luxury we cannot afford. With St. Paul, because **"we believe, we speak"**, confident that God will honour His promise to us, His promise that **"My words won't return to Me without doing everything I sent them to do (Isaiah 55:11)."**

This promise also holds true for our witnessing about Jesus on a one to one basis. Our Lord not only preached to crowds, He also spent time with men and women individually. In a night-time dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus shared John 3:16, the greatest verse in the Bible, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life."** Jesus conversed with individuals in their regular place of activity – at a tax office, in the marketplace, by the shores of a lake, and by a well. His encounter with the Samaritan woman by the well is especially instructive. Jesus first of all establishes a common interest with her – that is, their common need for water. He puts Himself in her debt by asking for her help. Jesus ignores her sarcastic reply, **"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"**, and lets her introduce the subject of religion. Jesus' personal interest in her arouses her own interest. He lets her speak about herself to Him. And then He speaks God's Word to her and awakens in her a thirst for the gift of the living water He alone can provide.

The story ends with this five-times-married divorcee becoming the most unlikely of witnesses to Jesus. She invites her neighbours to come and see Jesus. Then, as her neighbours meet and spend time with Jesus, they say a striking word to her: **"It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world (John 4:42)."**

Though the future of all people lay heavy on our Lord's shoulders, He interrupted whatever He was doing to spend time with the ordinary and insignificant folk of our world. Jesus wasn't concerned that they were not strategically important persons. He helped those nearest to Him and left the rest in His Father's care. Because all time is in God's hands, Jesus devoted His time here on earth to the needy and neglected people He met each day. Only Satan's time is short. The Saviour who said to His disciples as He commissioned them - **"As the Father has sent Me, so I send you (John 20:21)"** - still has wounds in His hands. When you feel discouraged or disappointed by your lack of visible success in sharing the Faith, remember those wounds! Ask the Lord of the harvest to bless the seeds you have down.

Oswald Hoffmann went fishing with a youth worker one day and asked him why more lay people don't witness to their faith. He thought about that for a little bit and then said, "Maybe it's because they think they have to convert people, and they're afraid they're going to fail." It's our business to sow the seeds, not to harvest the grain. We don't have to worry about failure when we sow. A farmer doesn't sow one seed for every plant he wants. He sows thousands of seeds because he knows not every seed will grow into a plant. Sowing is vitally important – if the seeds aren't sown, there won't be any plants. Our job is to sow the seed. We can let God worry about the harvest.

"My dear friends, stand firm and don't be shaken. Always keep busy working for the Lord. You know that everything you do for Him is worthwhile (1 Corinthians 15:58)." Amen.

And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.