

MISSION SHAPED LIVING

→ During both services last Sunday we focused on what it might mean for us to long for God or to hunger for God and in considering that we recognised that however much we may long for God, his longing for us is even greater. He made us to enjoy a relationship with him and he longs to enjoy that relationship with all of us and to satisfy the hunger that is within us for him.

.....Tonight, we're going to spend some time thinking about the result of us allowing our relationship with God to grow deeper. What could happen if we were so full of God that his life simply overflowed from us in every area of our lives? You see the whole point of our relationship with God growing deeper and more intimate is not just for our own benefit; it's not just so that we can feel full because our hunger is satisfied. We are called to be full of God, so that his love and his goodness flow out of us and touch the lives of other people.

.....If you ever ask people how they came to faith, you will often find when they relay their story to you, that they name a friend or a colleague or a family member who was really important along the way. They will have been important because of the inspiration and encouragement they offered to the person to get to know Jesus for themselves. You see, God works through ordinary people whose lives overflow with his love. That's what it means for us to be full of God. That's what it means for us to live mission shaped lives. But what does a mission shaped life look like in practice?

→ In the brief passage of scripture that we heard from John's gospel, Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples. He is about to leave these friends that he has shared life with for the last three years, but he isn't going to leave them empty-handed. He is giving them some work to do and he's also telling them about how they are going to be helped to do that work.

.....The task is pretty straightforward. Jesus is asking his disciples to carry on the work that he started in his own life here on the earth. "As the Father sent me, so I send you," he said. That's our task too as followers of Jesus today, to live our lives in such a way that we continue the ministry and mission of Jesus in our communities and workplaces and homes. As for the help they would get, well, he gave them the Holy Spirit. John says that Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit was to be their companion and their source of guidance and strength as they did the work that Jesus asked them to do.

→ So, the disciples were "sent" and we are also "sent" to carry on the work that Jesus began. But what does that look like in our everyday lives. What difference does it make to us that we are being sent by Jesus himself into his world to carry on his work?

BEING SENT TO BE WITH OTHERS

.....Well first of all "being sent" means being sent to be with others. Jesus was never under the impression that he was here on earth as a result of some kind of accident. There was reason and purpose for him being here. He had been sent on a mission and that mission defined his whole life, not just a part of it. In Luke 4 we

have his famous manifesto which reveals exactly what he believed he was here to do. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people.”

.....Jesus was seemingly constantly aware of the opportunities that arose every day; chances for him to share his Father’s love with those he met. As you read the gospels you discover that it doesn’t matter whether Jesus was visiting his friends’ homes, or attending a social event, or taking some time out, or even just travelling from one place to another; he seized every opportunity to share God’s love with those that he encountered. Jesus didn’t “do” mission; his whole life was mission.

.....So, “being sent to be with others” perhaps challenges our idea that we somehow have a normal everyday life that is made up of work and rest and friendships and family and responsibilities and then when all of that is done, we can somehow fit in Christian mission around the edges. That’s not how it was for Jesus at all. What we label everyday life is exactly the place where we are “sent”; the place where we are to live our mission shaped lives.

.....Who are the people that you meet in the course of your everyday living? Your colleagues at work; your next door neighbours; the till operators where you shop, those who serve you like your postman or hairdresser or window cleaner or bus driver? What difference might it make to the way that we live if we really understood that we have been sent to be among these people and that we have both the privilege and responsibility to share God’s love with them?

.....Let’s just reflect on that in a moment of quiet before the band come to lead us in our next song and then Rick will lead us in prayer.

BEING SENT FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

→ So, we see from the example of Jesus himself that we are sent to be among others. But, being sent, as Jesus was sent means that we are to follow the example he set in engaging with people. So, as we read the gospels we see that Jesus was also sent for the sake of others. It is not enough for us to just “be” with people in the vain hope that just somehow, something about us will rub off on them! It’s the way that we live amongst people that is really crucial so we need to be intentional about living as followers of Jesus.

.....When Jesus spent time with people he was with them as a distinct presence. He was the “holy one” in an unholy world, showing people what a human life could be like when it is fully lived for God. Sometimes today, we are so anxious to “fit in” and to be “relevant” that we sometimes risk being indistinguishable from those around us. We are so keen not to be considered odd or strange that actually there is nothing very distinctive about us at all sometimes.

.....Jesus certainly wasn’t led by the culture of his day, but he worked hard at engaging with his culture whilst at the same time taking his bearings from his Father in heaven. The time that he spent alone with his Father in prayer, meant that he could live a life where he only did what his Father wanted and only said what his

Father wanted. Several times as you read John's gospel you find Jesus talking about doing what his Father has told him to do or living to please his Father. How close do we come to being able to say that?

.....Perhaps one of the most distinctive things about Jesus' ministry is in the way that he describes himself as a servant. The expectation of the first century Jews was that the Messiah would come with power, showing his authority and establishing God's kingdom. Jesus certainly saw himself as the long-awaited Messiah, but he understood that God's mission was to be carried out in a very different way from what the people were expecting. The good news was to be offered as an act of love, service and sacrifice to the world.

.....The example which Jesus set for us encourages us to choose to live our lives for the sake of others, displaying the heart and attitude of a servant which is a crucial part of living a mission shaped life. Those of you who have avidly watched Downton Abbey over recent weeks will have noticed how a good deal of the work of the servants is done quietly and unobtrusively, in the hours before the rest of the house is awake or in a part of the house not often seen or visited by those being served.

.....As we read the scriptures, we recognise that servants are called to do their good work in the hope that people will see what motivates them, but there is always the risk that it won't be recognised or acknowledged. Servants are also always ready to explain why they serve, but they do so gently and with respect.

..... In some ways perhaps this makes living a mission shaped life seem much more do-able, because it takes the pressure off us. It's not about what we can achieve for God, but it allows God to achieve things through us as we live for the sake of others without seeking any reward or recognition. So, just how sacrificial is your life at the moment? What are you doing intentionally to serve others and what difference would it make to those around you if you really were living for the sake of others all the time?

.....So, again, a moment of quiet for us to reflect on that in relation to our own lives and situations before the band come to lead us in song and in our prayers for others.

BEING SENT FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF OTHERS

→ So all of us who are followers of Jesus are called to be live mission shaped lives, to be everyday missionaries. We are sent into the routines of our normal daily lives to look for the God given opportunities to serve those that we meet with God's love in our words and our actions. We are called to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus right where we are. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you," Jesus said.

..... Now, if that sounds a little daunting, remember that we are also supplied with that same power supply that Jesus had. At Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon him and in the upper room, we heard how he breathed that same Spirit into his disciples.

.....As we read the gospels we see how people's lives were transformed when they encountered Jesus, who was full of the spirit. The first disciples were

transformed from fishermen into apostle. Zacchaeus was transformed from a dishonest tax collector into a generous member of his community. Mary was transformed from a social outcast to a special friend. Legion was transformed from someone gripped by the darkness into someone set free to tell others about Jesus.

.....The Holy Spirit changes lives as people see and respond to Jesus in us and again that truth can take the pressure off us as we share our faith with others. Of course, not everyone will respond positively and not everyone will change. Some will be resistant to what we have to say and what we have to offer. Think of the rich young ruler who had a conversation with Jesus for example. He wasn't willing to make the changes in his life that Jesus suggested might be helpful. But as the Anglican evangelist David Watson once said, "If to be rejected means that we have failed, then Jesus failed many times. Surely the only real failure in evangelism is to fail to give people anything to reject!"

.....We are simply called to faithfully live as we believe God would have us live each day and pray that the Holy Spirit will give us the courage to share our love for God and his love for others with the people that we meet. Remember, and be thankful for the transformation that has happened in your life as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. That same transformation can happen to others too and we can play our part in that if we recognise that we are being sent.

.....Being sent as Jesus was sent means engaging with everyday life, believing that God has sent us to this place, at this time, to meet these people for his purposes. Think about the people you will encounter tomorrow, in your home, in your workplace, in the shops, in the gym, in the doctor's surgery, at the bus stop, at the school gate. All of those people may be transformed by the Holy Spirit if we are so full of God that his life and love overflow in our words and our actions.

.....We are called to live mission shaped lives where we are present in every place and every situation as servants of God for the sake of others. May we continually seek to be so full of God that he might overflow from us in each and every circumstance and may we have the joy of seeing the lives of others being transformed and made whole as we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us.