

“MISSION FOR EVERYONE”
Zechariah 8:24

Mission – evangelism – witness: they’re words that strike fear into the heart of the ordinary believer. Sally and I used to hurry through the missionary exhibitions at Spring Harvest and the Baptist Assembly with our heads down and our eyes closed in case we looked up at the wrong time and “got a call” to serve God on the mission field. When we have our open-air witness in the city centre during the summer, there are those Christians who cling to the walls of the Market Square even more firmly than the non-Christians with whom we’re trying to communicate, just in case anyone assumes that they’re with the church. There’s a great passage in Adrian Plass’s *Sacred Diary*, where he’s off to do some witnessing outside the chip shop and spends a long time looking for a Bible that looks like a copy of *The Guns of Navarone* so that no-one suspects him of being a Christian.

Fair enough, many of us quite rightly feel that evangelism is not our gift. That’s for the preachers and teachers, those who’ve been to Bible college or on a course. It’s for people who don’t mind being persecuted and ridiculed (despite the fact that very, very few people round here are ever persecuted or ridiculed for their faith – ignored, maybe, or persecuted for being a bit of a twerp, which would happen whether they were a Christian or not). But we don’t like to get involved – it can seem a bit pushy, a bit “holier-than-thou”. And what if someone asks us a question we can’t answer?

And, of course, if you’re going to get involved in mission, you need to be a bit of a smooth talker, to have the eloquence and arguments that will overcome any objections. You need to be able to quote the Bible at some length and have read lots of good Christian books with all the answers in. No doubt there are many other reasons why many people are scared stiff of being asked to witness to their faith. It would be interesting to ask around this morning what makes you so reticent about sharing the story of Jesus with your friends, neighbours, colleagues – but that would be pretty threatening, too.

Now, good as those things are – eloquence, good arguments, detailed knowledge of the Bible – they’re not the main things that we need to concentrate on if we are to get involved in the mission of the Kingdom of God, if we are to respond to the great commission of Jesus to take the gospel into all the world. Because, let’s face it, you’re in all the world already. You’re in the schools and offices and supermarkets and clubs and pubs and homes and neighbourhoods of this city every day. The challenge is not in the going – it’s in the living. For everyone to be involved in mission, the need is not to find people to witness to, nor is it to find the clever words and techniques, nor is it to get to degree level in biblical studies. The real need is for people who are prepared to commit themselves to live in the light of God’s grace, simply to **live** as followers of Jesus day by day where he has put them.

Most, if not all, of us here this morning have been touched in some way by the grace of God. Somehow, at some time, God has touched your life – even if it was only to bring you along here this morning. And that touch from God has caused some kind of change, some transformation has begun in your life. God is looking for people who will allow that transformation to show through in the ways that they speak and think and act. We are called to offer glimpses of God’s Kingdom through our own lives, to show something of the qualities that Jesus came to bring. As we’ve said so frequently in our continuing studies in Mark’s gospel, we are called to demonstrate that we are adopting Jesus’ agenda for our lives.

When it comes to communicating the good news of Jesus, the offer of a new perspective on this life and a powerful hope for the life to come, then there is no better advertisement than a life in which that new perspective is making a real difference. There’s a great song by Sammy Horner and The Electrics, called *Pour Me A Pint As Well*, in which the singer meets up with an old friend who was a real down and out, but he sees an enormous change in him and says the change in him is as great as the difference between heaven and hell, so “*I don’t know what you’re drinking, but pour me a pint as well.*” The friend goes on to talk about water from the well that never runs dry and tells him about Jesus – he’s made the difference.

The challenge to us is to live lives of such quality that people say, “I want a bit of what she’s got.” That’s the prophecy that Zechariah gave to God’s people in the passage we’ve just read. He looks forward to a time when the people of Israel would be so obviously blessed by God that everyone else would want a bit of the action. They live with a sense of peace, and they lead a life characterised by contentment and serenity. They are eager to go to worship (v19) and they show love for one another (vv16,17). And such is the quality of the lives they lead that we have this bizarre and comical image at the end of the chapter of ten people from other races clinging to the hem of the robes of one of God’s people and saying that they want to be a part of this too – “*Let us go with you because we have heard that God is with you.*” Can you imagine that? Walking through the Market Square or down St John Street on your way to church on a Sunday morning, a smile on your face and an enthusiasm for worship in your step, and by the time you get here, you’ve got ten people tugging at your sleeve saying, “Go on, let us come to church with you because we want a bit of what your God’s got to offer.”

One of my favourite stories in the book of *Acts* in the New Testament is the one where Peter and John end up in front of the magistrates for causing an obstruction by healing a disabled man and then preaching to the crowd that gathered. They stand in front of the magistrates and give a defence of their actions (*Acts 4:8-12*) and the magistrates – the great and the good of Jerusalem – end up being astonished at their courage and forthrightness and “*took note that these men had been with Jesus.*” It wasn’t because they were eloquent or special in any way – in fact, that is specifically discounted by Luke, the author – it was because they were obviously being transformed by Jesus.

That’s the bottom line as far as getting involved with mission and evangelism is concerned. We are called to live lives that are characterised by the qualities of God’s kingdom. As Jesus transforms us through the power of his Holy Spirit, let it show. Live lives of *shalom*, lives of peace and serenity, lives that demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:22*). Live your life with integrity – which is really what “holiness” means: a life that hangs together and your actions and attitudes are consonant with your calling as a follower of Jesus Christ.

In some ways that can seem less of a challenge than the call to go and preach, but in other ways it’s a whole lot harder. Are you demonstrating in your life the signs of God’s kingdom? Are you living a life of integrity? You see, it’s not about clever ways of inviting people to come to church, or attend an Alpha course, or read a book about being a Christian. It’s about bringing those people with you, because they’re curious to discover what it is that has really made a difference in your life. Pray that God will help you through the power of his Holy Spirit to live a life of transformation, and through that life to touch others for him. Then we’ll see that mission really is for everyone – not just for the gifted few.