

How to be a Missionary Today

1) God sends us out

Genesis 12: 1-4

Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him;

Isaiah 6.1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.'

The pivots* on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!'

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph* touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!'

Matthew 28: 16-20

⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Mission

The first thing we need to notice about mission is that it begins with God. God sends Abraham out of his home country to bring the knowledge of God to the land of Canaan. God sends Isaiah out of the temple to speak his word to the people. God sends his Son Jesus into the world to save his people from their sins, and the Son of God sends his disciples out into the world to tell all nations about this salvation. We are the disciples whom God is sending out into the world. How do we react to that? What do these three passages tell us about the mission God expects of us?

- Abram did what he was told. God made a promise to him and fulfilled the promise. But Abram did not argue, or dither about going, or delay until it was convenient. Abram simply got up and did what God wanted. Do we do that? We often have a good idea that there is something God wants us to do but we put it off until later, and then forget about it.
- What did Isaiah have to tell the people? What was his message? The first and most important message was simply that he had seen a vision of God. God was real. God was glorious and powerful. God wanted people to know about him. And if we read some of the prophecies Isaiah made we shall see that God expected a new kind of behaviour from his people. It is not enough to know there is a God. That knowledge should change the way we live.
- When Jesus sent his disciples into the world he had actually spent three years with them on a pretty intensive training course. They had got to know him; they knew his



teaching; they remembered his parables; they had seen him heal the sick; they had watched him go to the Cross and then seen him risen from the dead. They knew what they had to tell the world. Do we know? What sort of training do we need to be missionaries to the world around us? How can we get it?

- One really important principle underlying our mission is that God made the world and is already in it. People sometimes speak of 'taking God into the inner cities' or 'taking Christ into the world.' No. God is already there. He is with every person we meet there. Our job is to try and spot him so we can work alongside him. When we began Tariro in Zimbabwe we were simply looking at the needs of deprived children. As we have gone we have found ourselves working with Christ to make known the Kingdom of God. Our children become Christians; some relatives follow them into the Church; those who work with us are encouraged to think more about God; people in UK who give us money have found their hearts expanded and the Christian lives enriched by their own generosity. God is with us whenever we do good work. Can we spot him?

Let us pray:

You, O Lord, are God most holy, before whose glory creation bows down in worship.

Give us grace to look upon you with clear minds and pure hearts that we may recognise your voice. And having heard you speak we may heed your command, and confidently follow your Son, knowing he is with us always to the end of the age. This we ask through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

2) A time of small things

Mark 6: 32-44

Jesus and the disciples went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶ Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii^[b] worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish."³⁹ Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. ⁴¹ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And they all ate and were satisfied. ⁴³ And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

- God uses small things and turns them into big things. When we began Tariro we just started with some needy young people. We were not expert in charity work; we just did what needed to be done. We made mistakes but quickly the work flourished and grew. None of us felt it was us making it grow. Rather as St Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." (1 Cor. 3: 6-7) So we have had the excitement of watching Tariro grow and see God in the growth.
 - In mission most of us can only start from where we are. A small act, a cup of tea, a kind word, a small project to help the homeless will have results that we cannot guess at. Have you ever experienced that for yourself?
- Some people think there was no real physical miracle here; once people sat down in groups it turned out many did have food with them and they shared it with each other. Maybe the real miracle was that people shared what they had with each other! We may not like that interpretation. We may prefer to believe (as I do) that God who created the world can quite easily multiply loaves and fish. Yet we still need to remember there are lots of hungry people in the world. There are hungry people even in England. As Christians we need to share what we have with others. And when we do share we find it enriching. Hungry people are not just mouths to be fed; they are people with stories who can teach us a lot.
- In the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand Jesus gives people spiritual food in his teaching, and material food through his miracle. We need both. We need to find

the food for ourselves and then we can share it with others. What is the spiritual food we need? What is the actual food we can share? Can we see ourselves in that crowd feeling like sheep without a shepherd, longing for teaching about God and Christ? What do we need to know about God that will make us feel we love him?

- The central point of this Gospel comes when Jesus says: “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” Sometimes we make plans that are just too big. A simple slogan in the Catholic Church tells us to “see, judge, act.” We need to look carefully at a situation of need, injustice or suffering; consider what can actually be done to change it; then do it!
- Finally, we need to see that this Gospel has the Eucharist at its heart. Jesus “looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people.” Communion is one place where we receive the best kind of spiritual feeding. Do we go to it often? Do we consider how much Jesus must love us to give us his Body and Blood? When we do receive Jesus in Holy Communion do we invite him to let us see the world as he sees it? Do we open our eyes to see other people with the same love that he has for them? Holy Communion should change our lives. Do we let it?



Let us pray:

Heavenly Father you take what is little in this world and by your awesome grace and wondrous love you create an abundance of goodness for your people. Gather us by your grace into that same love, where the lost can be found; the hungry can be fed; the weary can find rest; and all can be nourished for everlasting life by the true and living bread, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

3) Following Christ

Mark 10:46

⁶And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." ⁵⁰And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." ⁵²And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

- Jesus asks only one thing of Bartimaeus: "What do you want?" and then he heals him. Jesus doesn't ask for money. He doesn't tell him to live a good life. He doesn't say he must become a follower. He simply heals him. Bartimaeus does then follow Jesus. In most other stories we hear nothing more about the person Jesus healed. Perhaps they followed him; perhaps they did not.
 - Over the centuries this is how the Church has done mission in foreign lands. People go out and see their fellow human beings suffering from poverty, disease, ignorance and violence. They set about helping. Sometimes the people become Christians, sometimes not. They are all beloved children of God and we help them for that reason alone. God's gifts are free.
- Bartimaeus' life is transformed. He was blind and now can see. He can follow Christ. In Tariro we transform children's lives. Left on their own they have no hope of education, no hope of escaping poverty. All they can see ahead of them is hard and bleak. Through Tariro their life changes completely. Education, food, love come their way. It's not a miracle in the way that healing a blind man is a miracle, but the effect is the same. The works of healing, education, community building, helping the poor which we do in UK and outside do transform people's lives and we can give thanks for that.
- When we hear about world poverty we can despair. There are millions of poor people, millions of refugees, millions who are hungry. It is easier to shut our eyes. Yet Bartimaeus was just one person whose whole life changed. In Tariro we have fifty children whose lives have been changed. God sees each person as infinitely worthwhile. If we look at people as individuals loved by God we will not bother about the numbers. We will do what we can for the one and know that is what God wants.

- There is one little phrase at the centre of our Gospel reading which is immensely important: Jesus says, “Call him”. That is what we do as missionaries in our own worlds. We call people to Christ. We tell them where they can get help. We show them love. We stop thinking only of ourselves and see the needs of others. Each little act of kindness or generosity is calling, calling the person to see that someone loves him or her; and that Someone is really God. Isn’t it wonderful that we can be ambassadors for God?

Let us pray:

Most glorious God, there is no reason to see, other than to behold the beauty of your glory. By the working of your power you clothe us with your dignity and beauty and send us out to tell of your glory. Give us the confidence of faith to recognise Christ in our Brother and Sister, and to honour our neighbour as those who are created in your image. May our ways and actions be for him, who makes us see by faith and sends us out to do his will, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.



4) “Blessed are the Poor”

Isaiah 58: 6,7

Is not this the fast that I choose... to share your food with the hungry and to bring the homeless poor into your house — when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Ps 82:3

Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

James 1:27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Luke 4:16-19

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

- God cares about the poor. He cares about widows, orphans, strangers and anyone who is vulnerable. That is clear throughout the Old Testament. The Jewish Law speaks often of the need to care for these weak members of society. So do the prophets. When Jesus said “blessed are the poor” (Luke 6:20) he was not saying anything new. Who are the weak members of our own society who need our care?
- Those of us who care for young people through Tariro can be really glad that God has given us this opportunity to support young people who are very close to his heart. We often think we are being virtuous giving money to time away to others. Well, yes, we are, but much more importantly, we are privileged to share in God’s work and to open up life for other people.
- Pope Francis said we should let ourselves be evangelized by the poor. (*The Joy of the Gospel* 198). Those of us who work with the poor find they have a joy, a resilience and a trust in God which is quite breath taking. They can invigorate our faith and give us hope. Some of us are fortunate to have money we can give them. They pay us back with hope and joy. The more we give, the more we get.

- Poverty itself is bad. It traps people in a miserable life. They have to turn to crime, prostitution or (in Zimbabwe) political violence to survive. God wants us all to have good, fulfilling lives. Yet those of us who have money always seem to want more. We want more things. We become obsessed with security. We don't rely on God. We don't trust Our Lord Jesus Christ. The poor do that because they have to. Giving to their needs helps us to change our own priorities and so love God more.
- Can I give more, so I can receive more? Can I see in each poor person a brother or sister whom God loves as much as he loves me? Can I see the children of Tariro as children of God?

Let us pray:

It is you Lord, whom the generations are to call blessed; it is you who enrich our lives as we offer worship and prayer to you. Send forth your Spirit upon your people and set us free to proclaim you, so that there may be no poor; no one who is in poverty of faith and no one in material need. May we find freedom and security as you cover us with your blessings, and confidence to engage with those who need to know of your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



5) Failure

Mark 4:1

Jesus began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him..."

John 6: 66-69

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God."

John 19: 25,26

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!"

- Jesus' ministry began with astonishing success. Great crowds followed him. (Matt. 8:1) There were so many people he sometimes couldn't find time to eat. But as the story goes on the crowds fade away. Jesus goes alone to the Cross. Peter had said he would die with him, but Peter runs away. Only Mary, John and a couple of women stand there at the Cross. Jesus appears to be a complete failure.
 - We know it was not so. Jesus rose from the dead. The little group at the foot of the Cross become the foundation of a new church. But nobody then could have guessed this would happen.
 - In our world today we are obsessed with success, we gather numbers, compare statistics, interpret data to try and show that the Church is succeeding. In England we have some very big and thriving congregations, but many are growing smaller; religious communities get smaller. Society becomes more secular. It is easy to feel the mission of the Church is failing. What can we do about it?
- In the first place we mustn't lose heart. It is God's Church, not ours. He will look after it. He just needs us to be there. St Mary and St John stood at the foot of the Cross, that ultimate sign of failure. We must do the same.
- We need to look at things differently. The real missionaries in England may not be the ones with spectacular ministries and huge congregations. They may be the small groups of people all over the country who meet week by week in a small village church, or on a bleak housing estate, keeping that church open. If it is open people will continue to come, to get married, have babies baptised and ask about Christian faith. Most new Christians drift into the Church. If it weren't for these people keeping the churches open there would be nowhere for them to drift. England's countryside would become pagan (*paganus* in Latin simply a country person). All of us who keep churches going or who keep religious communities alive are

missionaries showing the world that God is alive and providing a place where people can meet him.

- It's not enough, though, to grit our teeth and grimly stick it out. We still need to be Christian, to show love, joy and peace and to attract people by showing them the attractive Christ. It isn't rocket science; it doesn't need radical new ideas. We need to pray together, read Scripture together and celebrate Eucharist together. Then we will discover that Jesus was telling the truth when he said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I among them." (Matt. 18: 20)
- We also need to look outwards. Small, struggling groups – whether congregations or monasteries – can become very inward looking, concerned with themselves and their survival. Christians look outwards. The infant Christian Church in Jerusalem after Jesus' Resurrection immediately started telling people about him. We need to do the same. Little things like renewing the church notice board or refreshing the website can quietly give a message that we are alive and well. Giving support to Tariro, or another charity we care about also draws us outward to care for others, not just for ourselves.
- Now, in this fifth week of Lent, can we draw up a plan to show the world we are still alive, we still love Christ? Can we commit ourselves to small actions that show we care about people poorer than ourselves? Small things become big things if we give them to God.

Let us pray:

Lord of heaven and earth, without your mercy we would be empty and without your love and grace we would not know the fullness of life. As we look upon the devastating failure of the cross and acknowledge the painful reality of our sin inflicted upon the child of Mary, pour forth your grace and mercy into our lives that we may live, and move, and act in accordance with your will, and at our end behold you face to face, the One true and everlasting God. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.

6) Hope of the Resurrection

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹² And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³ They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." ¹⁴ Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her. (John 20:11-18)

- A single word, "Mary" changes everything. The gardener is revealed as Jesus. Mary recognises him. Tears are changed to joy, despair to hope. The darkness fades and light reappears. Can we think of times when something like this has happened to us? If we can remember such a time we will have a glimpse of what the Resurrection means.
- Tariro means "hope". Without Tariro many children's lives would be desolate. They would have no hope. We see that on the estates of English cities where kids join gangs, take to drugs, destroy other people's lives and their own because they have no hope of a better life. We can't stop their destructive behaviour just with more policing. Somehow we must give them hope. That is one aspect of Resurrection: bringing hope into lives that have become dark with despair.
- Hope, for us Christians, does not mean optimism. It doesn't just mean thinking everything will turn out well. Hope for us is Jesus Christ rising from the dead. We know what it means to go with Jesus into the dark, to follow him to the Cross, to feel the bleak despair of his death, to see him disappear into the darkness, to think like his disciples, that we will never see him again; and then he comes back out of the darkest of all places. Light reappears scattering the dark. Hope returns casting aside despair.
- The hope of Jesus is not just for this life. Our hope in this life is founded on the hope we have of the Resurrection. Jesus said, "I will come again and will take you to myself." (John 14: 3) Heaven is not simply a place, with beautiful choirs of angels and maybe golden churches. Heaven is being with Jesus, or more wonderfully being with God. That is what we look forward to after death. However unpleasant the process of death may be, we look forward to and long for something that is full of joy, life and love. That is the hope of the Resurrection that should fill us with light and love; and that will attract other Christians to Jesus. That is the truest kind of mission.

- “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep....in Christ shall all be made alive.” (I Cor. 15:20) This is not “pie in the sky when you die”! Christians do not spend all their time thinking of heaven and ignoring earth. This is God’s earth. We need to look after it, heal it and make it fruitful as the environmental movement is teaching us to do. St Paul said, “Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the Sons of God.” (Romans 8: 19) Can that be us?
- Likewise, other people on this earth are the beloved children of God. Where they suffer from poverty, war, exploitation, famine or anything else, we are called to show them that the Risen Christ cares for them. How best can we do that? We do mission, not to make the Church bigger and more powerful but to bring people into a new life which is full of hope; a hope both for the right kind of material, earthly joy and the final joy of life with God, beyond death.

Let us pray:

By your nature Lord, nothing can break the bonds of your love, and nothing impure can exist in your presence. As you shattered the doors of hell, so remove the obstacles in this life that get in the way of our relationship with you. Let the hope of the Resurrection be our inspiration for all our motivations that everything on earth may know of your love. May we never experience the pain of separation, but live the life won for us by your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

