

Devotional Blog

Sunday 14th June

Do you remember what it felt like when you got a new job? There'll be excitement at the fresh opportunity, maybe a change in location, greater remuneration and perhaps even a new job title.

But there's also the worrying bit. How well will you fit in? Can you perform to the level the management want from you? Will you be able to learn from your boss?

In response to these mixed emotions it's always useful to re-check the Job Description of the new post to remind yourself what exactly it is that is expected of you.

In the Missionary Discourse in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 9:35-10:23) a small group of Jesus' followers are given a new job. Jesus chooses twelve of his disciples and turns them into apostles. He sends them out in pairs with a rather daunting job description:

- Tell folk that the Kingdom of God has arrived
- Heal the sick
- Raise the dead
- Cleanse the leper
- Cast out demons

Wow! In other words, do exactly what Jesus has been doing.

Now the incredible thing is that the call for followers to become apostles didn't just mean the first twelve disciples. The call to be sent out for Jesus is a call to us too. Yes, I know, it's been a long time since you cleansed a leper! And with lockdown it feels even harder to be sent out.

Yet, our mission as individuals and as a church is to continue the ministry of Jesus, and that means addressing the whole range of human need.

Of course, you will hear the argument that we churches ought not to get involved in non-spiritual matters and get back to the “real job” of preaching the Gospel and saving souls. But this misses the point. Preaching the Gospel and saving souls means grappling with the ills of today. It means that we apostles need to be out there wrestling with issues like poverty, racism, injustice, public health care, social alienation, the powers of oppression and the power of death.

Even during lockdown, we have a missionary role to play, using the phone, email, social media and continuing acts of kindness and support. Our prayers are vital to our ministry, especially those for an effective, safe, and freely available vaccine and treatment for Covid-19.

The pandemic has given us several major challenges. One of these is financial. Church budgets have been heavily depleted as income has plummeted. The Christian Charities which we support as part of our missionary arm have also suffered a substantial dip in income. Alongside this we know that poverty and unemployment will increase locally, nationally, and globally. The poor and the young will be hit economically harder than most of us in the years to come. Our outreach projects like the Extra Mile, The Foodbank, the Bike Project, Baby Basics will be needed like never before. We may well need to twin with poor churches rather than just toilets!

A second challenge, that may well be more hidden, is the surge of mental illness exacerbated by Lockdown and the economic state of the world. Our Church mission will need to be characterised by non-judgemental listening, understanding, personal support, and kindness.

However, the pandemic has also exposed a potentially uplifting challenge. There is a tangible spiritual need out there. Huge numbers of folk have been re-examining themselves and are seeking more meaning in their lives. It has not just been regular churchgoers who have been tuning into the array of devotional material on the internet. We hear from “street pastors” about a desire for spiritual feeding. Virtual church must continue after Lockdown even when our buildings are open again, alongside our physical gatherings. We must not retreat into our burrows!

Our Mission is making Jesus known and to express our Christian love by grappling with human need. And while we act, we pray for a Spiritual Revival and that we will be a part of it.

Jesus had confidence in his first apostles, and he has confidence in us too. Why? Because, in the words of Apostle Paul, we have the Grace of Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 12:14).

So, let's act as apostles. It's the greatest job we have ever had!

Mark Gilks

Hampton Mission Partnership