

The Church Unleashed as Sign

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 November 2020

Preacher: Rev. Clive Jennings

[0 : 00] You probably haven't heard about Jock Kinnear and Margaret Colvert. They aren't mentioned in the everyday, but they are significant to everything that we do when we're out and about.

Their work is impacted each and every one of us, whether we walk, whether we drive or whether we cycle. It was in 1961 that a man called Herbert Spencer, he was driving from Heathrow, from London, and on his way he took pictures of every road sign that he passed.

He realised how confusing those signs were at the time. Each one had different typefaces, symbols and colours. And with the increasing numbers of cars on the road, it was obvious that Britain needed an understandable and easy way to read road signs.

The government gave him a huge project and he undertook that project and gathered together designers Jock Kinnear and assistant Margaret Colvert, who had just finished creating those iconic signs that we still see on our motorway system today.

By carefully coordinating lettering, colours, shapes and symbols, the pair created a system of signs that inspired us and inspired most modern road signs, not here, but around the world too.

[1 : 32] Pictures instead of words that were based on many signs. And the girl in the children's crossing sign is actually based on an image of Margaret Colvert herself as a child.

I thought that was really cool. Signs inform, signs communicate, signs direct and signs warn. They convey a consistent message and above all, they prevent chaos unless you're at that multiple roundabout in Swindon.

And my goodness, well done if you can negotiate that well. How does that relate to us? How does this thing of signs relate to us as a church of being a sign of God's presence to those around us? In many areas, I think we need to go back to the drawing board, back to God to show us how we are called to convey a consistent message that informs, directs, encourages and most of all directs people to the message that his church is about love and grace.

Is that the sign that people are reading through us, his everyday disciples? The signs of the Christian life is often summed up quite clearly in Fruits of the Spirit, as Paul lists them in Galatians 5.

[2 : 56] The Holy Spirit is at work in us and through us as we show love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

It's a good test. It's good for us to test out the signs that we're displaying. People notice if you're directing them one way and yet the character of your life contradicts the message that we're conveying.

Especially maybe self-control, you know, waiting online for your service provider for 15 minutes or trying to get through to somebody and you've waited for ages.

Your call is important to us. It's a great sign of your character when they actually answer. In our reading this morning, Paul and Barnabas, the great encourager, have shown God's love in amazing signs and wonders.

Yet not everyone recognised that sign of God's grace. It didn't fit with their own way of thinking. It didn't fit with their culture. We read this morning of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra where a sign of God's power unleashed gave them the power to heal a man who was lame from birth.

[4 : 13] And that man is healed. A very clear sign that these two men are moving in the power of the Spirit and have something very different about them.

The interesting thing is that the people didn't recognise that the sign was from God. They were used to worshipping gods with a small g and therefore people attributed that sign to anything other than the one true God.

They believed it was something to do with their Greek gods. And the story almost turns to farce as they start bringing offerings to Paul and Barnabas, believing that they are Greek gods personified and brought to them in human form.

You know, Paul and Barnabas are saying to them, no, no, you've got it all wrong. You have seen the sign, but you have misunderstood. The wider church hasn't always got its signage correct with its schisms, feuds, divisions.

It's hardly been a unifying sign to the world. Yet we can change that. You and I can change that today.

[5 : 25] The church unleashed through the power of the Holy Spirit, through you and me, is a powerful sign. We signpost people to the Bible quite rightly. Yet our responsibility is to be living signs of that good news.

People will hopefully recognise and experience that, what they have read, if it's shown through you and I that we are living it out.

Grace, forgiveness, generosity, sharing, caring, sacrificial giving, hope, encouragement, prayer that seeks and enables the spirit to move and perform signs and wonders that make people sit up and ask, who is this Jesus?

How do I receive this? Tell me more. Show me more. I want to know. What is there about you? I want something of that. Witnessing to the good news of Jesus can either commence with or be accompanied by a sign or wonder, just like our Bible story today.

Maybe you've experienced that yourself. Maybe you've stepped in and pointed out to someone that God is making himself clear and known in a way that is very personal to them, either through a word, a situation, a moment, whatever that sign may have looked like.

[6 : 48] I recall some time ago I visited somebody in Southmead Hospital. I was on my way out and I was walking down the corridor when I was aware of somebody running after me.

It was a nurse. I was on my way out and she said, this is amazing. I've been trying to get hold of a chaplain and they're not responding to their bleep and I desperately, we need a priest at the moment.

There's a lady who is dying and her daughter is with her and asking for a priest. Could you come? I went into the room and spoke with the daughter.

She was holding her mum's hand and I prayed with them both. The daughter paused and she said, do you believe in angels? I told her that I did.

And she told me that her mum is a Christian and she said that her mum had always talked to her about angels. And then she said, but I don't believe in God.

[7 : 53] But I wish I did. I would love to have a sign that my mum's angel is actually here. As you know, in those situations, it's not the time to actually deal with theology and go deep.

It's just time to pray and ask for the Holy Spirit to come. We sat for a few minutes and we prayed and her mum passed quietly and peacefully into eternity with the Lord.

We were in a room where the window behind us was very firmly closed and there was louvre blinds in front of it. Whereupon the louvre blinds suddenly started to flutter, really flutter.

She gasped and put her hands to her face and threw her tears, fell back into her chair. And she said, I've just felt feathers on my face and I feel the most deep sense of peace that I've never experienced before.

She paused and she saw that I was smiling. And I said, what did you ask for?

[9 : 13] What did you ask for while we were praying? And she said, I asked that God would give me a sign. And then she said, thank you, Jesus.

Thank you for that sign. I believe in you. That's probably a prayer that her mum had prayed day in and day out for her, as we may have done for our children.

God has got an amazing sense of timing in the signs that he gives us. Like Paul and Barnabas, we need to communicate those things that are a God incidence, not a coincidence.

Signs that direct others to his love, presence, power and purposes to live like the kingdom is near. Maybe when you see somebody wearing a cross, a sign of the cost that Jesus paid for to free us from death and give us new life in him.

Will you talk to them about that sign? Will you share with them the freedom that it's brought you, your hope and your new life in Christ? I pray that none of us miss the signs that he's showing us because they're given for a purpose.

[10:37] His purpose. His purpose.