

"Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom"

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, as we look into your word together now, we pray that you would speak to us through it, that you would encourage us, that you would challenge us, that you would bless us, that you would transform us through Jesus, we pray, amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

These are the marks of mission that you looked at with Carol last time. To tell, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom, to teach, baptize and nurture believers, to tend, to respond to human need by loving service, to seek to transform unjust social structures, and to treasure and safeguard the integrity of creation.

And Carol will have sort of taken you through how actually this is God's mission, not our mission, but we as his people are called to join in with him in. Can we go to the next slide?

[1:52] And so the first one of these, tell, is based on Matthew 28, verses 19 to 20, where Jesus says, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And that's also the basis for the second mark that Carol will be looking at next time. But that sense that we've got good news to share. I remember, which is a long time ago now, back into the 1980s, we were working in Yorkshire at the time, and we were involved with the Billy Graham Crusade Mission England.

Back in the 1980s, we were part of the team that worked with Sheffield, and in Sheffield United football ground, we had 36,000 people cramming into that stadium every night for a week, getting on for a quarter of a million attendants overall.

And interestingly, like that reading in Acts 2, there were typically 3,000 people coming forward every night in response to Billy Graham's preaching.

They weren't all becoming Christians. Many of them were going to rededicate their lives, or they just simply wanted to know more, or they wanted prayer for something. But it was a powerful preaching of the gospel that people were responding to.

[3:16] More recently, in Inverness, we had Luis Palau, the Argentinian evangelist, preaching in Buck Park. That would be about 15 years ago now. Those are big events. Those are big events. And we had big name preachers. Everybody back in the 80s had heard of Billy Graham.

Luis Palau, less well known, but still well known. People who had been called to be evangelists. We are not all called to be evangelists like that.

But the mark of mission is more about what we are called to as every members of God's people. A more low-key response. Not that we're all called to stand up and speak to 36,000 people at a time, but we are called to know what we believe and be prepared to share it if people ask.

I've headed this standing orders. Standing orders cover what you're normally expected to do, regardless of circumstances, regardless of whether you're being watched or not, until you're told otherwise.

[4:23] In the Army, the Navy, or the RAF, all the service personnel know that standing orders are to be carried out whether or not the CO is watching. And in a sense, being an evangelist is a calling to be an evangelist.

But the Great Commission, go and make disciples of all nations, is the standing orders for every believer. That is obviously challenging.

So it's important to note this, that mission is first and foremost God's mission. And that is our reassurance that what we are called to do is to fit in with what the Lord is already doing.

We're not called to run ahead of him. We're not called to make it up, go it alone, do our own thing, stand on our own. No, we're called to fit in with what the Lord is doing.

And that's really what I want to unpack this morning as we look at what it means to tell. And can we go on to the next slide, please?

[5:33] Because there's quite a few scriptures to go with what I'm sharing this morning. There are three hindrances that we can find to sharing our faith, and we can identify them as apathy, fear, and ignorance.

And I want, hopefully, this morning to ease our concerns and our fears above all else. First of all, there is a danger of apathy. I simply don't care.

And I don't think that's one that generally applies to us. So people are often accused, and churches are often accused, of apathy. I don't believe that.

I think that's too harsh. But what we might do is hide behind the expectation that actually this is something for other people to do. That sharing our faith is something for the minister to do.

It's something for the elders to do. It's something for special people in the church to do. It doesn't affect me. And I don't believe that's the way that Jesus spoke.

[6:40] He said, this is for all of us. And the counter to that is to have love. That when we love God, and we love one another, as we're all called to do, that moves us to want to do all we can for them.

And so for this, I've used Matthew 9, verse 36, where it says that when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless.

And I know that's Jesus, but it's something that we can be moved by, all of us. That when we see a need, when we see people struggling, when we see people looking lost and helpless, we should be moved within ourselves, because we have the same spirit within us as was in Jesus.

That we have compassion. And it's that compassion that moves us to want to help in whatever way we can. The essence of apathy is not caring.

The essence of compassion is that we do care. We need the love of the Lord in our hearts, first and foremost. But we may still be afraid.

[7:56] And we've got two verses here. Ephesians 6 and John 15. Where Paul writes, Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me, so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains.

Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. I'm afraid to speak up. I'm afraid to share my faith. And yes, it is a fear that we can all feel. And I do hope to ease that fear in a few minutes' time. But I think it's helpful to recognise that even Paul felt that fear.

He wouldn't be writing like this if he didn't. Pray that I would fearlessly make known. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly. He wouldn't be praying, oh, make me fearless, if he didn't find it a fearful thing to do.

What are we afraid of? Well, I think possibly we're afraid of hostility. If I tell people about Jesus, I'm somehow going to get a hostile response.

[9:05] I wonder also whether what we're afraid of is coming across as some sort of narrow-minded fanatic. I don't want people to think I'm a nutcase. Some sort of religious loony. And that can inhibit us as well.

We can't rule out opposition. Jesus in John 15 says, If the world hates you, understand that it hated me first. As disciples, there is a call to take up our cross.

There is a warning that we may face opposition and hatred. That we may face something more than misunderstanding. That it may not necessarily be pleasant. We can't rule that out.

The gospel isn't always welcome. There is a battle. But is there anything we can do to make ourselves less afraid, less fearful?

Are there ways in which we are inhibited by fears that actually are groundless and can be eased?

And I hope to do something about that, as I say, in a couple of minutes' time.

[10:04] The third hindrance is ignorance. I don't know what to say. If somebody tells me, or says to me, How do I become a Christian?

What do you believe? I just feel so tongue-tied. I wouldn't know how to answer. And so I tend to hide away and duck the issue. Because I simply wouldn't know what to say.

I'm not outgoing like that. But... And perhaps this is something that we can do something about. And in 1 Peter 3, verse 15, he says, And this is part of the reading that Jim brought to us, Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you, To give the reason for the hope that you have.

But do this with gentleness and respect. In other words, we're not expected to be religious nutcases, Grabbing people by the lapels and shaking them and saying, Are you saved?

That's not what Peter's asking us to do. He's not calling us to go out in the streets and make idiots of ourselves, And make nuisances of ourselves. He closes this by saying, Do this with gentleness and respect.

[11:14] There's a way about going about this that is gentle and respectful. And that we shouldn't be saying, Oh, I've got to be aggressive and somehow crude about this.

No, Peter says, do it with gentleness. And respect. And he also says, can we just go back to the previous one? Thanks. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you.

So there is a sense here of being asked first. That we are not, in sales terms, expected to go out cold calling to people who aren't listening, Who aren't interested, who don't want to know.

Peter is saying, be prepared to explain what you believe to people who ask you. Well, that takes away a lot of the fear that I'm somehow having to be some sort of aggressive religious nutcase.

What I am expected to be is someone who knows what they believe and is able to explain it respectfully, gently, and when asked. So, in that sense, we are actually called to do less than we may fear we are being called to do.

[12:25] But we are expected to know what we believe sufficiently that we can explain it. And if someone asks you today, what do you believe?

How do I become a Christian? We are expected to be able, any of us, to say, well, this is what God has done for me. And he can do the same for you.

But those three hindrances, apathy, fear, and ignorance, do need naming and addressing. So, the next slide. Jesus said, go and make disciples.

That simple word, go. It's worth noting that in the passage that we heard from Matthew 28, if we've gone back a couple of verses earlier, it says that everybody came together when they saw him, they worshipped him.

Although some doubted. But there is a context here of worship. Of going, of being sent out. That sense of being commissioned by Jesus, I've got something for you to do, and that is to share the good news and make disciples, arises from worship.

[13:41] That as we engage with the Lord, as we draw close to him, as our hearts are filled and thrilled by what he has done for us. That heartfelt worship fosters a sense of readiness for service, and also a sense of confidence.

We've been in the presence of the Lord, and it's the Lord that's sending us out to do this. We've got his backing, his commissioning, his authority, his encouragement. And worship, our experience of worship, ought to instill that and engender it and build it up within us.

So going out stems, arises from worship. Going out also arises from experience and knowing the presence of the Holy Spirit within us.

The spirit of adoption, that God places within the heart of every believer, that we instinctively know that God is our Father, that we are his children, that in Jesus he loves us, that we belong to him, and that his love is wanting to flow to us, and through us and from us.

And so linking that sending, that go to the Holy Spirit, connects us to the flow of love. This is God's mission. God is reaching out into his world, and he wants to reach out through us.

[15:06] That his love, his saving love, his invitation, is flowing out from himself, through his spirit, into us and out of us, and through us to others. And the Holy Spirit within us increases our love for God, and shares God's love.

And 2 Peter 3.9 says, he is not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. It is that love of God that wants to flow through us.

It's not our love. It's not something we're somehow striving to generate within us. It's something we receive and let pass on. And the third thing here is that go points us outwards.

The New Testament has several models for church. We could look at the church as the body of Christ, how we're all interrelated, and each of us has got a part to play. The New Testament describes the church as the bride of Christ, the bride that he loves and gives himself for, and a sense of a love relationship, a love affair there.

The New Testament does not have the church as the club of Christ, something that is inward-looking and self-serving.

[16:25] We want to spend time with Jesus, and yet as we draw close to Jesus, we find that he's on his way out to heal lepers. He's on his way out to wash people's feet.

He's on his way out to share the good news. And if we want to say, I just want time with Jesus, unfortunately, Jesus is on the move. He's going out. And if we want time with Jesus, we have to go out with him.

So there is that strong sense of go in the Great Commission. Jesus, in his last words to his disciples, says, go and make disciples of all nations.

And finally, the word tell, which is our theme for this week. And we had that at the start of the service, this reminder of what we have as the basis, the essence of our faith.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, as the Scriptures foretold, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, again, according to the Scriptures, this was all part of God's plan.

[17:32] This agrees with what else the Scriptures said. Jesus' own death and resurrection is the foundation of the Gospel. It's a forgiveness of sin and eternal life that brings us.

His death on the cross brings us forgiveness. His resurrection brings us eternal life. It's the heart of the Gospel that we proclaim in John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that everyone who believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

If you can do nothing more, if someone asks you, what is it all about, it's to remember those two passages. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

He was buried. He was raised. And God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

And if you do no more than quote those two verses, you've done a lot. There's a lot more to explain and unpack, of course. But surely, those five lines there can be memorised.

[18:44] And as we know them and as we live them out, we will find that more flows from us. And again, this is back to the Holy Spirit.

We're not and never were expected to do all this on our own. Acts 1, verse 8, the last of those passages, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

And you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. We're not expected to do this in our own strength. We're not expected to generate it within ourselves, to whip ourselves up, to work ourselves up, to do this.

At some sort of, I don't know what. What we find here is the Holy Spirit equipping us with both the boldness and the ability to reach out effectively.

That all we are needing to do is to make ourselves available for him to use and for him to equip us. As I said, and it will be said again and again, this is God's mission.

[19:51] This is God expressing his love for his creation and wanting to include and involve us in that expression. And what we'll be looking at next time with Carol is how God is already at work in people's lives and all he's asking us to do is to join in and fit in with that.

But I'll leave that for another time. Tell. This is about how we proclaim. And again, think back again to those verses in 1 Peter chapter 3.

Be ready and able to explain what we believe gently and respectfully when people are asking us. It's not beating people over the head with a Bible.

Never was. Not meant to be like that. But when people see something or they're seeking something or they're searching something or they're spotting something about us and they say, okay, what's it all about?

We can gently and respectfully and lovingly explain. And so, we pray for opportunity. We watch for what God's already doing and seek to fit in with that.

[21:08] We can pray, Lord, what are you doing in this person's life? What are you doing around about me? Open my eyes so that I can see what you're doing. So that I'm not running ahead and doing my own thing but how I can fit in with what you're doing.

Please show me. We can model it that as Jesus is in the business of transforming people's lives, we let him transform our lives so that we shine brightly for Jesus that people see in us as they should.

There's something different about you. What led me to faith in the first place many years ago was when a friend of mine became a Christian. I think I might have shared this. And there was something different about him.

He had different interests, different values, a different enthusiasm. He wanted to go to church for goodness sake. He changed. And that got me asking what has made that change?

So we pray and we model and then we tell. And one last slide please. I think there's one more.

[22:26] Should be one more. Is there one more? It's disappeared. From Romans 10 verses 14 to 15. I don't know where that one's gone.

How then can they call on the one they've not believed in? How can they believe in the one who they've not heard? How can they hear without someone preaching to them?

There is ultimately a need for an explanation. That however much we pray and however much we live it out, we do need words in the end to explain the difference, to explain what it's all about.

So whilst I hopefully can ease some of those fears that we're not meant to go out in some daft way but we are meant to do so respectfully, we're not meant to run ahead and do our own thing, we're meant to fit in with what God's already doing.

There is ultimately a need to be prepared to tell and explain and give an account of what we believe so that others can believe too.

[23:38] How can they hear without someone proclaiming to them? We need those words. So tell is just standing orders.

It's not calling us to be big name evangelists but it is calling us to be prepared and willing and able to fit in with what God is doing in other people's lives and tell them about what we believe about Jesus.

That is our standing order. As we go through the Mark submission, we'll see that they are balanced, God is reaching out into his world in different ways and that they are interrelated as we practice each of these marks they actually feed into one another.

That as we show love, as we tend, as we care, as we treasure, that earns the right and the respect to explain what we believe. As we proclaim the good news, we are in the business of transforming people's lives.

But for today, go and tell our standing orders because sinners always need saving just as we needed that saving experience of Jesus.

[24:54] So we too need to allow others to make that same response. Amen. Amen. Amen.