

The Mission Of The Church

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[0 : 00] It is a very great joy to be back again at St. John's in Shaughnessy, a church that has done so much over the years, not only for the work here in Vancouver, but across the country.

I want you to think, if you will, this morning about the mission of the church. Now, the word mission, as some of you know, is not a biblical word, but it's a word that came into use very early in the Christian church, as people thought together about their calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

And it's a word that has come to the fore throughout the history of the church, whenever there has been a renewal taking place in the life of the church. Those renewals have come at different times in the course of the history of the church.

And I dare to believe that we're in a period of renewal in the life of the Christian church today. And so all across the world, in virtually every part of the Christian church, there is thought and reflection about the mission of the church.

And what is taking place, it seems to me, in this thought and reflection, is a growing consensus about what is involved in the mission of the church.

[1 : 28] And I had the privilege last July of being at the Antican Consultative Council meeting. That's the council that brings together representatives of all the provinces of the Antican communion around the world. We spent a good deal of time reflecting together about the mission of the church and the part of the Antican communion in that mission.

And I was deeply indebted to David Gutari, who was one of the great bishops of Kenya, for some of his reflections. And I'm drawing a great deal in some of his thoughts this morning, as I think out loud with you.

He pointed out that most people, when they think about the commission given to the church, will think perhaps of two passages. They'll think of the closing verses in Matthew's gospel, going into all the world to preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And a phrase that's left out very often in sermons in this section, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always. Or of the verse in the first chapter of Acts, written, as you know, by St. Luke, where Jesus says, ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

But very often we neglect some of the picture of the mission of the church that we find in St. John's gospel. And I want to add to those two verses that I quoted this morning, two quotes from St. John's gospel.

[3 : 07] The same, almost identical words said on two occasions. The first time they are said is in part of that long reflection that John's gathers together in the upper room, things that no doubt have been taught at different points in the ministry of Jesus.

But in that long section of reflection, you'll find these words, and you'll find them also in one of the resurrection appearances, where Jesus appeared after his death and resurrection to his followers in the upper room.

And the words are these, even as the Father hath sent me, so send I you. Even as the Father hath sent me, so send I you.

See, I would suggest to you that the mission of the church arises out of the very nature of God, a God who created, a God who sustains, a God who loves, a God who sent his Son into the world to reveal in terms that human beings could understand and respond to something of the depth of his love, something of his nature.

Jesus speaking to that group of people that came to be his first followers, says to them, even as the Father hath sent me, so send I you.

[4 : 35] So I would suggest to you that the mission of the church requires that we first understand something of what Jesus saw his mission to be, something of what he saw the purpose of his being sent into the world to be and to do.

Because it's only as we understand something of that that we can understand the fullness of the mission of the church. Because I think the term mission is an inclusive word. It brings together all the things that were part of what Jesus came into the world to do.

The place where he sets forth most clearly early in the ministry, as far as the biblical record is concerned, something of his understanding of what he was sent in the world to do, is in the first time he spoke in Nazareth, his hometown.

Many of us who are called to preach know that one of the hardest places to preach is in your hometown, where people know you. Jesus chose a section from the book of the prophet Isaiah and read it to them.

Let me read it to you. Jesus says, or reads the quotation that says, The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

[5 : 59] He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him, and he began to say to them, Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Clearly a central part of what Jesus saw he was sending the world to do was to proclaim the reality of God, the fact that God is, the fact that this world in which we find ourselves is not an accident, but is a creation, the fact that God loves, that even when human beings made in his image, male and female made in his image, sin, he did not leave them or neglect them.

He came to them where they were, in the midst of their condition, to reveal his nature and the depth of his love. So the central part of the mission of the church is the proclamation of the mighty acts of God in history, in creation, in redemption, in salvation.

This is the core within the life of the church. It's the proclamation that enables people to come to faith, to be part of the community of faith.

[7 : 40] And one of the incredibly unkind things that the church often does to human beings in this world is to call upon them to do Christian things, to reflect Christian values without first becoming Christian people.

and that's an incredibly unkind and destructive thing to do. And it's done far too often. So an essential part of the mission of the church is evangelism, that proclamation.

But Jesus, in fact, did more than simply proclaim. He was concerned about the nurture, the growth of those who came to him.

And he concentrated a major part of his ministry with a small number of people, inviting them to be with him so they could learn from him, so they could grow in understanding. And once we've become part of the community of faith, there needs to be constant, continual, and never-ending growth.

In the model of that growth, I think we can find very clearly in a very simple little verse in Luke's Gospel that comes when Mary and Joseph come back to Jerusalem to find Jesus when he remained behind.

[8 : 57] And they go back together to Nazareth. And then this verse is found. Jesus increased in wisdom and stature in favor with God and man.

And here we get a picture of a four-fold pattern of growth that is important for all of us and part of the reason for Christian nurture in wisdom and the ability to understand and comprehend within certain limits because there are things that we accept by faith and cannot understand totally.

But we need to be able to give a reason for the faith that is in us, to give a reason in terms that touches the experience of people in the period of history where we live.

And we need to increase in wisdom. Certainly Jesus did as he grew and developed. In wisdom and stature, our culture desperately needs a regrowth of reverence for our human bodies, a regrowth of concern about the totality of salvation, which means total health.

our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, the means whereby we carry out the things that we want to do and believe that we are called to do by God.

[10 : 26] We need to have a reverence for them. We need to grow in stature, in favor with God, spiritual growth, and an ever-deepening sense of relationship with God as Father through one, Jesus Christ, whom we know as friend.

Because we are essentially relationship beings. Without that relationship to God, it transcends. The full meaning of life can never be discovered or experienced.

Favor with God and other human beings. Because our lives are nurtured, touched, influenced, and affected by our contact with other human beings.

In addition to the Great Commission, we have the Great Commandments to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and to love our neighbors ourselves. And those two are never separable.

John was very blunt about that. He said if a person says he loves God and hates his neighbor, he is a liar. That's strong language, but that's John's language. Because one of the ways that is given to you and me to love God is to love those whom God loves.

[11 : 42] So the second part of the mission of the church is to be concerned about the nurture and growth of people in the faith within the community. But Jesus said also that he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.

So a third aspect of the mission of the church is diakonia, service, loving service after the pattern of our Lord service. Loving service that was designed to set people free, to live and grow as the children of God, to come to recognize their dignity as children of God.

One of the tragedies of our world, and the church has not been immune from this, is the way in which we have developed patterns of service that so often do not set people free, but make them dependent.

Jesus never made people dependent. He wanted them to grow and recognize their dignity so that they could be interdependent within the community. One of the tragic things in the life of the church is very often the kind of clericalism where people are locked into a dependence on those who have been ordained, which is not the nature of the biblical insight of the people of God.

The people who are ordained stand within the baptized community with special responsibilities for nurturing, setting people free to grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit to be made more like unto Him.

[13 : 22] And the focus of the service of our Lord was the service of those who are marginalized, those who are in greatest need. And He said that in the passage that we read.

To preach good news to the poor, poor of spirit, poor of body, poor in any way, any pattern that marginalizes people, good news needs to be proclaimed.

Release to the captives. Very often, we're captive by dependency relationships so that we cannot grow to our full stature as children of God.

To give sight to the blind, how limiting it is not to be able to see. And how doubly limiting it is to have eyes to see and not to be able to see.

Not to see the meaning and understanding and depth of relationships that are possible for us. Jesus came as one who served.

[14 : 31] He said that he that would be greatest among His followers must be the servant of all. So part of the mission of the church is to be a community of service. Wherever the church exists, it should be looking out to those in particular need within the community and be concerned about serving them in the name of the Lord of the church after the pattern of the service of the Lord of the church.

So another aspect of the mission of the church is that diakonia, that loving service after the pattern of our Lord service so incredibly important.

But there's another area that is so important as well and that is transformation. Just look to the Romans in the twelfth chapter.

Paul writing in the Christians at Rome says to them, be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your minds.

And we need to be concerned about transformation, the transformation of people but also the transformation of relationships, structures, and patterns.

[15 : 58] Bernard Dozier, a great Christian leader in Washington, D.C., wrote a little book called The Authority of the Laity.

These words, that God entered history in Jesus Christ to create a new people, the people of God, people who knew they were God's children and called to be about God's mission after the pattern which Jesus had been about his father's mission.

And she says, that mission includes seeking to change the world. But it's so easy to talk about change and to give no clarity about what we understand or want the world to become, what we believe God wants it to be.

And when we don't have some clarity about that and we talk about change, so often people interpret what we say just in political or economic terms. The change that the Christian faith is concerned about is much more radical, much deeper than political and economic change.

And Bernard Dozier puts it in these words, to help bring into being a world in which every human being knows that he or she is loved, is valued.

[17:27] You and I know that for ourselves, that we are loved, valued, by God. Do we experience within the community the affirmation that we are important?

Are we enriched by the love of the community, the church? And she went on to bring into being a world where every human being knows that he or she has a contribution to make.

Do you and I believe that about ourselves? That because of God's gift of life, of time, of energy, and talent, that every one of us has a responsibility to contribute to the well-being of God's world, that we all have contributions that we can make, we all have talents that we can use to enrich the human community so it becomes more the kind of community God wants it to be.

And she goes on to say, where every human being has a right to share in some of the gifts of God's creation. That God has made human beings in his image, placed them on this earth, and provided for them the things they need to sustain life.

to create a world in which every human being knows that he or she is valued, is loved, has a contribution to make, and has a right to share in some of the gifts of creation.

[19:18] You see, that's a task that you and I can be about, that Christians can be about, wherever we live in this world. Every day of our lives, you and I touch the lives of some other people.

Every day of our lives, some other people touch our lives. What kind of an impact do we have on the lives of people who we touch? The people who we meet in their functional capacities, and the work they do, that we don't think of as friends?

Do we relate to them in a way that affirms their value and worth and dignity as people made in the image of God? Do we help them to believe that they do have a contribution they can make, and that they're called upon to give and to serve, not just to look for things for themselves?

And are we concerned that all human beings who are loved by God share in some of the resources of creation?

That's a very simple sentence, but a very demanding sentence, and they give some picture of the total work of transformation that the church is called to be about.

[20:37] So I would like to suggest to you that the mission of the church includes at least those four elements. The proclamation of the mighty acts of God in history, that central act of God's act in and through Jesus Christ, His life, His teaching, His death, and His resurrection, that we might know and understand the nature of God.

But the mission also includes the nurturing of people in understanding what it means to believe in God, and to give expression to that belief by word, by attitude, by action.

And the mission of the church also involves becoming a ministering community that serves after the pattern of the service of our Lord. And the church is also concerned, called to be concerned, about the transformation of people and of human relationships so that a new kind of world comes into existence and that that new kind of world is expressed within the Christian community.

It is the first fruits, the first expression of what that new kind of world should be. So the Christian church comes to be a community of mutual acceptance, mutual challenge, mutual support, in which we experience the love of God, where it's possible for the Spirit to work most effectively.

As the biblical record reveals so clearly, the Spirit works best where two or three or more are gathered together within that community of love.

[22:32] I think more and more in our day, Christians are coming to recognize that the mission of the church is this inclusive thing, that all those elements are important and they all need to be held together within the koinonia, within the community.

Some of us may be called particularly to the ministry of evangelism, the proclamation of the word. Others may be called to service. Others may be called to nurture. Others may be called to the work of transformation. But they are all part of the mission. And we need to be concerned that whenever the Christian church exists, it exists as communities of people, such as those of us gathered here, that all those aspects are part of the life of that community, part of the mission of the church in the world.

Jesus said to his followers, he says to you and me, even as the Father sent me, so send I you. What a glorious calling, what a glorious mission. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We need now to prepare ourselves in taking together what God offers to us in the bread and the wine and to offer ourselves to God anew and afresh as we have been encouraged to do the God who has loved us. [24 : 18] So, they came everyone whose heart stirred him up and everyone whom his spirit made willing and they brought the Lord's offering. We sing him number 246.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[28 : 15] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. O God, most high and holy, three in one, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we offer you this day, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto you, to whom be all praise and glory. Amen.

Let us pray. Risen and ascended, Lord, you live forever to intercede for us.

Graciously assist us as we now join an intercession for others. Deepen our understanding of your great love for them and for us. Deliver us from self-concern and make us channels of your grace to those for whom we pray, to the glory of your name.

Amen. Amen. As we begin our prayers this morning, let us first pray for the Church. Most gracious God, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church.

[30 : 32] Fill it with all truth and in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it. Where it is an error, direct it.

Where there is anything amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen and confirm it. Where it is in want, furnish it.

Where it is divided and rent asunder. Make it whole again. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us also pray for a special work of grace in our Church and in the whole Church of Canada.

Amen. O God, our Heavenly Father, we humbly pray thee to bless abundantly the efforts that are now being made to turn thy people in this parish and in others to sincere repentance and a more lively faith.

[31 : 45] Prepare all hearts to receive the seed of thy word. grant that it may take deep root and bring forth fruit to thy glory.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. As we turn our attention to the needs of people in this parish and in the world, I would invite you in the periods of silence between phrases to bring those names before the Father who you know are in need.

And also to think about the needs of the world community. Be mindful, O Lord, of thy people bowed before thee and of those who are absent through age, sickness, or infirmity.

Amen. Care for the infants. Guide the young. Support the aged. Encourage the faint-hearted.

Collect the scattered. Bring the wandering to thy fold. Travel with the voyagers.

[33 : 17] Defend the widows. Shield the orphans. Deliver the captives. Deliver the captives. Heal the sick.

Sucker all who are in tribulation, necessity, or distress. Here we think especially of those hostages in Beirut in the moment.

Amen. Remember for good all those that love us and those that hate us.

And those that have desired us unworthy as we are to pray for them. And those whom we have forgotten, who thou, O Lord, remember.

For thou art the helper of the helpless, the savior of the lost, the refuge of the wanderer, the healer of the sick.

[34 : 56] For thou who knowest each man's need and hast heard his prayer, grant unto each according to thy merciful lovingkindness and thy eternal love.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. On page 76, God grant that we may with all our hearts be able to hear and respond to this invitation.

We do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins or in love and charity with your neighbors, intending to lead the new life following the commandments of God, walking from henceforth in his holy ways.

Draw near with faith, take this holy sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees.

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all men, we acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine majesty.

[36 : 31] We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings. Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father. For thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, say, forgive us all that is past, grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in unison of love.

Through the honor and glory of thy name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Amen. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, through this great mercy and promise forgiveness of sins, blow them with hearty repentance and true faith and turn unto him.

Have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in eternal life. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. The comfortable words of our Lord Jesus Christ, come unto me all that labor and are heavy laden and I will refresh you.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish but have eternal life. Will you stand?

[37 : 48] The Lord be with you. And with thy spirit. Lift up your hearts. Lift up your hearts. Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.

It is me. My soul is due. Very meet, right, and our bounden duty that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, creator and preserver of all things.

Therefore, with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name, evermore praising thee and say, Holy, holy, holy, Lord of all of us, heaven and earth, Lord of all of us, glory to thee, the Lord of all of us.

Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Will you kneel? Blessing and glory and thanksgiving be unto thee, almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son, Jesus Christ, to take our nature upon him, to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, who made thereby his one oblation of himself once offered a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

It instituted in his holy gospel, command us to continue a perpetual memorial of that his precious death until his coming again.

[39 : 30] Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee. Grant that we, receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed body and blood, who in the same night that he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he break it and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take me, this is my body which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. And likewise, after supper, he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.

Do this as often as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me. Together. Wherefore, Lord of the Lord, the Lord of the Lord, and the Lord of the Lord, and the Lord of the Lord, we are humble servants and all life of the Lord, in memory of my sin, and the life of my son, in the mighty resurrection, and the glorious sanctity, and the good work of his coming again in glory, in memory of my deity, and the sign of the holy bread, and the life of my son, and the proper everlasting salvation, the memorial of his compassion, and the glory of his Ki.

And the Lord that I am never arked for thee, wherefore, his persévines, the care and the Jesus Christ, wherefore, His forgiveness of yin ■■■cks, most últimos blessings, through me and through him, by the marriage of servir piration, and the laws of God, and■■■ing the gospel, and the name of thy who should be Savior and who would cry while his premiers of sin.

And the prayer of God, and I am not the Holy Spirit. All of you are my favorites of the Holy Spirit. May be fulfilled with my grace and my dedication.

[41 : 34] Through the Jesus Christ of the Lord, I am the faithful, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. All I am the Lord will be here to you. All I am the Lord will be here to you.

Will you stand? May the peace of the Lord be always with you. And with my spirit. Will you greet one another in Christ's name?