

Outreach At St. Johns 1989

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Talking about Africa and with emphasis on South Africa. With the rise of nationalism at the turn of the century, mission and outreach had to take a drastic turn and change of pattern.

Whereas in the past, missionaries had ample opportunities and lots of chances to do their work in countries under colonial rule, now there is strict control.

Missionaries, and I'm speaking of missionaries in Asia, are having a great problem to obtain visas for their work. For example, in Malaysia, we have housed the Overseas Missionary Fellowship School for Missionary Children, the Chifu School in the Cameron Highlands for many years.

But right now, they are seriously considering closing the school and relocation. The reason is that the government is becoming increasingly problematic in the giving of visas to missionary teachers who are needed at the school.

And then the Anglican Diocese in Malaysia had benefited greatly from the work of missionaries of the OMF who came out from China when China fell to the Communists.

[1 : 22] With an understanding of the culture, the background, the language, the dialects, they did a tremendous work in church planting and ministry in the Anglican Diocese in Malaysia.

But because of the difficulty in getting visas right now, missionaries had to leave the country, and so the church was facing a crisis in leadership.

In the light of this, I believe that missions in Asia in particular have to develop two crucial strategies. The first strategy is the training of local leadership.

The second strategy is to move into the country with a trade to become a tent maker. How does St. John fit into these two strategies? I believe that St. John's can be part and parcel of the training of people who are in Canada who are preparing to go home to serve in the church.

I will be going back to Malaysia after my training at Regent College, and I am thankful that St. John's has been in many ways, more than one, been a partner with me to prepare me to go home to Malaysia.

[2 : 34] Secondly, I would like to challenge each one of you to consider being a tent maker, to consider giving or investing three to five years of your life in a cross-cultural mission experience.

There is a great demand for English teachers. With a teaching in English as a second language certificate, you have a vital key to many closed doors. There is also the area of engineering, medicine, business administration.

Actually, they don't mind if you preach the gospel, as long as you contribute to the well-being and development of the country. Thank you. Last year, I had the privilege of working in Honduras as a nurse in a small clinic up on that country's northwest coast.

I was supported in going through my home church, which is in Ontario. I was supported financially and through prayers and letters. And I also was supported by an organization called SAM, South American Missionary Society, which is affiliated with the American Church, and it's also an organization that is supported through St. John's Outreach Committee.

My work was involved with the campesinos of Honduras. That country is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and the campesinos make up approximately 80% of the population in Honduras.

[4 : 04] It was a tremendously rewarding, enriching experience to be with those people. I was enabled to grow tremendously in my own faith and knowledge of the gospel, and I also gained a much greater sense, a better understanding of the global Christian community.

These people left me with many impressions. One particularly was of their tremendous faith, their hope, and their determination, despite the fact that they lived their lives in extreme poverty and under some terrible cases of oppression.

They have a tremendous desire to grow in their faith, to learn more about the gospel, and the Holy Spirit is moving in many ways throughout the country, and particularly in the community in which I lived.

And they really know Christ as one who suffered with the poor, and yet who is giving them strength to carry on and to make something better in their lives.

So as I said, they want to grow and to learn in their own faith. They need to grow within the context of their own lives.

[5 : 27] So how can we help them as Christians in the same Christian community with them? Well, we can help them through the work of ordained people and laity, both here and in Honduras.

We can provide assistance and encouragement in that way. But along with the responsibility of helping them in their religious education, we can also help them in many other ways, just as Yeoman has mentioned in his country.

We can help them in literacy programs, in health care programs, and in other employment opportunities, ways in which they can gain control in their own lives and be independent and feel a sense of respect and dignity.

My own hope is that I'll be able to return to Honduras to do more health care work with the people and to share my faith and to help them in their religious growth.

And there are ways in which we can help them here at home because they have expressed a very great sense of encouragement and hope by the word that they get from people in other countries.

[6 : 39] And so we can help them here at home also through our prayers and through showing support through them in various actions in the community. Thank you.

It's almost impossible in two minutes to do justice to Africa, a place of incredible complexity, a place of 50-some-odd countries and almost 500 million people, a place where 2,000 separate languages are spoken, a place of poverty on a scale that we don't know anything about really in North America, but nevertheless a place where there's a remarkable amount of good news about God and what he's doing in Africa.

In this century, Africa has gone from roughly 8 million Christians to over 200 million Christians. The rate of growth of the church in this century in Africa is absolutely unprecedented in the history of Christendom.

There's a kind of growth which creates problems. One of the problems, of course, is that they can't keep up with all the growth. The gospel is spreading so fast that churches often are a bit boggled by how to keep up with it all and how that growth might be matched with a similar depth of discipleship in taking on all the issues of African culture and all of the poverty and all of the need that there is in Africa.

God is doing a marvelous thing across Africa, and it's going to be very soon when I think the Western world will be visited by African missionaries, just as Western missionaries went to Africa to plant the seed of the gospel there in many cases.

[8 : 15] So Africans are starting to come. I know some already, and more will be coming to share the faith with us. And that's a wonderful day. It's coming soon. So be ready for it.

I've been asked to say a little bit about what Africans themselves are doing. The ministry that I am involved with is called African Enterprise, and it's really a team of about 50 evangelists, Africans themselves, who have banded together with the support of support offices such as the one we have here in Canada and people all around the world to enable those people to go and take the gospel to the cities of Africa, people who wouldn't have the chance, really, to get beyond their own local area were it not for the support from the Western world that enables them to really have the opportunity to go all across the African continent, some marvelous evangelists who, in many cases, turn whole cities upside down when they go to it.

Africans are doing quite a lot, but I think as Yeoman was saying, we as Westerners have a role really to help and to enable and to equip Africans themselves or third-worlders as they are in their own context to get out and to do the ministry that they've so very much longed to do.

In terms of St. John's, Sue and Brian, of course, have just returned recently from Zimbabwe with stories about owls and many other things, and they were beneficiaries of the warm moral support of the St. John's family that they experienced in correspondence and all sorts of support.

Last year, we, as a congregation, the outreach committee supported Leslie Richardson with her husband David, was here in the congregation last year on a bit of sabbatical from South Africa. We paid for her to go, or plane fare for her to go and have more training as a preschool trainer of

trainers to go to South Africa and work in the black townships, training up preschool teachers, something desperately needed to begin to create a new generation of people who have different ideas, perhaps, about what the future might be in that country.

[10:17] That's something we have been doing at St. John's, and my own personal experience has been very wonderfully to be prayed for by a great many people in my own trip to Africa, which took place earlier this year.

But on behalf of all three of us, I wanted to say just a few things about what anybody sitting out there in the pew looking at us thinking, well, what can I do, might actually take up.

And so the committee graciously offered me one more minute to sum up a few things about what you might do. The first thing, I think this is really on behalf of all three of us, is take the effort to learn a bit about what's happening, what God is doing in another part of the world.

My own experience is really that my contact with Christians from other cultures has been one of the most enriching things in my Christian life. And I really would wish that for all of you as well. So take the time to learn.

Tonight, after the evening service, I'm going to be showing slides of the five countries that I visited earlier this year in Africa. And so do come along to that. That's just one example of ways in which you can learn.

[11:21] The other thing, of course, is to pray. And really to pray and not just say that you'll pray. And I bring with me here a book called Operation World some of you are probably familiar with. Ten dollar book. Its subtitle is A Day-to-Day Guide to Praying for the World.

It goes through a country, virtually a country a day. And it gives you information about the country, what the church is doing there, and what the prayer needs are in that country. It's a marvelous resource if you really wanted to seriously learn what God is doing around the world and begin to pray for that.

As Yeoman has said, there's a great need for people to go, either in the shorter term or longer term, particularly with skills, marketable, practical skills. And once you come to a country with those skills, you can get away with almost anything by way of telling people about the Lord.

The other thing I'd like to mention is that Yeoman has particularly been involved with beginning to set up a program here in St. John's of hospitality and friendship towards overseas students in Vancouver and those particularly who are amongst us.

Something on our own doorstep that we can do to be involved with people from a different part of the world and to learn from them and to support them. Likewise, this diocese is just beginning a partnership program with the Diocese of Northern Argentina which is a diocese which Sam's, which Susan was with, actually planted and began.

[12:41] And we are, as a diocese, beginning to create links. There will be a group going over to Argentina and then groups from Argentina coming here to share in a partnership fashion with another part of the world.

Of course, the last thing is financial. We in the West have comparatively an incredible amount of money. If you've been to Africa and seen the poverty there, you can't help but saying that we in the West do have resources, financial resources, that can be put to very strategic use in supporting the third world.

When Western currencies go overseas, they multiply incredibly into local currencies that can really make things happen and enable opportunities to take place. So those are some of the ways in which you, perhaps, might be involved in the overseas dimension of what God is doing there.

I'm handing over back to Dave, I think, who's now looming on the horizon. Thanks, Jeff. I'd ask Rod Laughlin to come up and share with you some of the work that he has been doing on your behalf in the food bank.

Thank you, David. The reason for the food bank at St. John's is simply we give to those in need for the love of Jesus. Jesus often met people's physical needs before he met their spiritual needs.

[14:03] We are reaching out to those who need it most with the generous support and resources that you provide for us to work with. How do we do this? Well, as you may know, there's a small basket in the narthex for a collection of non-perishable goods.

You could designate funds to the food bank in your giving envelopes. You can offer your time to deliver or to sort groceries or even phone work for those people who can't get around.

Phone work is very valuable. Most importantly, you can pray. Food bank activities all started from a former parishioner's conviction of a great need in our midst and to many different groups.

Refugees, widows, unemployed people, and yes, maybe even a student that you brush shoulders with. That's just to name a few.

A very large opportunity for the outreach of this community of believers and for ministry. How has it grown by the prayers and support of many of the volunteers, over 40 of you?

[15 : 15] For instance, at Christmas last year, we produced over 125 hampers. This represents 9,000 pounds of food that was bought from a wholesaler plus the collected goods throughout the year.

Now, let's be honest. There were a few glitches in the system and some people didn't want our help to our surprise. We were given incorrect names. Well, those things happen.

Nothing I can do about that. But you helped to feed well over 300 miles of Christmastime last year. And on behalf of them, I say praise God and thank you all very much.

Each hamper had a tract of St. John's Gospel in it and we used over 17 different languages so that may give you an idea of how many different countries these people are coming from.

If you know of anyone, a family inside or even an individual inside or outside this congregation, if you know them and you know that they need our help, then please get in touch with the office or me personally.

[16 : 29] Yes, even at 10 o'clock at night because hungry people don't always come to services like this. Within the new information and programs board that we have, there is a place for comments and suggestions.

We would appreciate any ideas that you have. Think of all this as an opportunity, as a challenge to us all to share your love and to share it in the name of Jesus.

Thanks, Rod. I'll now call upon Harry Robinson who will tell us a little bit about InterVarsity on a national scale.

First, I want to tell you the story of a missionary who spent his life in India, a scholar and a bishop of the church and he has come back in his retirement to England and has written a book called Foolishness to the Greeks and he says this about missionary effort in our world.

Remember, he's been a missionary in India all his life and he says of our Western European society, ours is not a secular society but a pagan society.

[18 : 00] and its paganism having been born out of the rejection of Christianity is far more resistant to the gospel than the pre-Christian paganism with which cross-cultural missions have been familiar.

The most challenging missionary frontier of our time is right here among us. Now, I just want to tease St. George's College slightly because they're advertising their sale in May and if you look at their ads you will see that they are now featuring the dragon and no longer St. George.

There's a... I don't know if there's hidden significance in that but there may be. Well, there is a mission field of the greatest importance in the University of British Columbia.

Students spend very important years of their lives in a community of study, research, professional training, athletic and social involvement where many marriages are contracted, families founded, life work is chosen and...

and they are prepared for ideas and are confronted with norms of moral and ethical behavior and these are established during those vital years.

[19 : 38] The InterVarsity Christian Fellowship draws together students who having themselves heard the gospel and responded want to share that gospel with others, their student peers.

A program of prayer, Bible study, literature distribution, social activities, camping, conferences, lectures and missions provide the occasion within the University curriculum where the gospel is presented.

The University experience is very seriously impaired if during the years that a student spends there he does not have a serious confrontation with the content and implications of the Christian gospel.

I would reckon you have wasted your years at university. The toughest students to reach are the products of our own schools where the only way to deal with Christianity is to close your mind to it.

Students from overseas are very much more open to the Christian gospel and the InterVarsity's work is very much more effective among overseas students than the students from our own culture for reasons that I think Leslie Newbigin, the man I spoke of at the beginning, underlined for us.

[21 : 13] The very foundations of our university owe an enormous debt to the faith which they now describe as irrelevant.

That the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship organizes students to confront other students with the Christian gospel is to my mind a most essential activity on the university campus.

Thina Ayers, Kathy Nickel, Sean Love, Tam O'Rourke, and Guy Bellerby, all from this congregation, along with Sully, have been very much involved in this work.

And it is through this and many others in our parish that a critical area of ministry and mission is being confronted by this congregation.

This story, finally. Back in about 1956, a mission was held at the University of British Columbia sponsored by the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

[22 : 33] The content of that mission formed the basis of a book that was subsequently written by John Stott called Basic Christianity.

Basic Christianity began at the University of British Columbia. It has now been translated into many, many languages and distributed to many, many parts of the world.

And the function of this book is to confront people with what is Basic Christianity. The function of the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is to maintain a living witness in schools and colleges and hospitals to what is Basic Christianity.

That nobody would grow up and graduate from our schools and colleges who has not confronted the gospel of Jesus Christ. So I commend that to you as another part of our mission responsibility which comes close to all of us as a congregation and as individuals.

Thank you. We have hopefully through our discussion this morning painted a rough sketch of the nature of the outreach program here at St. John's.

[23 : 59] It's a complex and emotional issue yet a program with great potential and magnitude. To reach out means to go beyond ourselves and engage in a mutual relationship with other people.

And so it's time now for us to receive your valuable input and direction in terms of the outreach program at St. John's and I'd ask you to just turn to the questionnaires that you received with your bulletins this morning and we'll take a few minutes now just to fill them in just take some quiet time read through them and indicate what your preference is.

If you have any questions about it I dare that we be informal now and deal with them perhaps we should we will all be back at the coffee hour after the service if you have any questions or comments we are really open to your input it is your program here at St. John's and it may be a little confusing but during the offertory hymn if you just pass your questionnaires to the main center aisle then we will come down and just collect them after the sidesmen have collected the offering but during that process.

We also have some extra pencils here so if any of you are missing something to write with if you just put up your hand and indicate such we would be glad to bring one over to you. Thanks very much.

I'll take it as well. Thank you.

[25 : 53] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[28 : 23] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.