

A Model of Mission for the 21st Century

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It is a real privilege to be with you. I bring you the greetings of the Anglican Church in Singapore, where my wife and I live and work with OMF International. Though originally we come from England, as you may have guessed. It is exciting being an Anglican in Singapore. The Anglican Church we go to has grown from about 900 members to about 1,500 members in the last three years. We have about 180, 170 adult baptisms every year. And to belong to an Anglican Church like that is really quite exciting. That would be described as revival in England. But we are not the largest Anglican Church in Singapore. The cathedral has about 5,000 members, has 13 services every Sunday. There are 27 Anglican Churches in Singapore. And in other parts of the world, it really is exciting to see the Anglican Church growing.
- [1 : 0 5] And I was saying in the earlier service particularly, it is exciting in Nigeria to see the growth of the Anglican Church. I was in the city of Abaddon a few years ago, and the bishop invited me to preach at the opening of a new Anglican Church. And it had started 11 months before with a few believers. And now they had built a church that held about 500, and they had a congregation of about 1,000. And there was this wonderful celebration of the opening of this new church, and very sort of African, lots of singing and dancing and clapping. And the bishop was sort of standing there looking very sort of bishoply. But I said to the bishop afterwards, it is really exciting to be in an Anglican Church like this, a new Anglican Church. He said rather modestly, yes, this is the fourth church like this we planted in this city in the last year. And to see, I mean it is good for us, isn't it, because we struggle sometimes as Anglicans. It is good for us to see how the Anglican Church is growing in some parts of the world. And in Nigeria there has been an explosion of the Anglican Church, as I hope that Felix often tells you, but he may be too modest to tell you.
- [2 : 1 9] There are about 20 million Anglicans in Nigeria, nearly all evangelicals. They are the largest group of Anglicans anywhere in the world. There are more Anglicans in church in Nigeria than in Canada, America and England put together. The typical Anglican worldwide is a Nigerian male evangelical, that's what I am told. There are lots of females as well. Sadly in England often there are far more women in church than men. So praise God for what he is doing, and I bring you the greetings of Anglican believers in Singapore, most of course of whom are Chinese. We work with the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, which was founded as the China Inland Mission in 1865 by a man called Hudson Taylor, a remarkable man who had a deep burden to reach the people of inland China.

There were many missionaries working on the coastline, coastlands of China. He felt a burden for those inland in the great country of China, millions who had never heard about Jesus.

[3 : 29] So he identified very closely with the culture of China, adopted Chinese dress, Chinese hairstyle and so on. Other people thought he was rather peculiar. Other missionaries thought he was rather bizarre.

He was criticized in the Times newspaper in London. He was criticized in the House of Lords even in the UK. And when he wanted to marry, the governess of the girl he wanted to marry thought he was not fit to marry anybody.

And it reminded me of the reading we had for our first reading, the epistle from Philippians 2, and the anthem, that beautiful anthem we had by Bruckner, part of the setting of those verses from Philippians, and our hymns too.

Because that was the example of Jesus, wasn't it? He left everything. He left his Father's glory, left heaven. I mean, it's impossible for us as human beings to understand what that meant. But he came down and identified with us and lived among us.

And that is precisely what Hudson Taylor sought to do. Now the mission is called the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, international. We're based in Singapore. We have about a thousand missionaries working in a whole variety, evangelism, church planting, as doctors, development workers, and so on.

[4 : 46] Thirty percent of our fellowship, of our missionaries, are Asians. And I find that really exciting, to work alongside people who are Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Thai, and so on.

But a bit more of that later. If you want to know more about OMF, then there's some literature on a table, I think in the, is it called the Trendle Hall? After some famous man, Douglas.

So do go and look at it there. I thank you too for supporting particularly Ed Newdorf, one of your congregation who's serving with us in the Philippines. And thank you for all those that you support, for all those you pray for.

You know, I can't emphasize too much how important your prayers are. Maybe those who pray do more than those who go. So thank you for your support.

Now I'd like us to look together at this passage from Luke 10. The sending of the 70 by Jesus. Fascinating story. Here are 70 people. It would be helpful if you have a Bible in front of you, page 67 in the church Bibles.

[5 : 55] Here are 70 people. And I imagine they'd spent some time with Jesus and they'd listened to his teaching and they'd observed his life and they'd seen his miracles and they'd been fascinated by his parables.

And then Jesus turns around to them and says, Well, now it's your turn. You've had enough theology. You've had enough sermons. Now go and do something.

A reminder to us that being a Christian is not a matter simply of sitting in church. It's not a matter simply of belonging to a Bible study group or hearing lots of sermons. Being a Christian is a matter of going out into the world to serve Christ.

So Jesus sends these 70 out. And as we look at these 70, I'd like us to think about what does it teach us about our task, our ministry, our mission in the 21st century.

Anyway, I gave to the vicar this rather ambitious title, a patent model for ministry for the 21st century, now beginning to regret it. Anyway, let's look at this together.

[7 : 05] What lessons do these verses teach us about our ministry, your ministry at St. John's here in Vancouver in the 21st century? I'd like to look at it under four headings.

The vision that Jesus has, the people that Jesus uses, the task that Jesus gives, and the demands that Jesus makes.

First, the vision that Jesus has. He says the harvest is plentiful. The harvest is ready. We were in Alberta just two days ago and there's quite an urgency of completing the harvest.

Now Jesus says there's an urgency about completing this harvest, not of wheat or barley, but of people, people who will respond, who are longing to hear the message of the kingdom, who want to hear why I have come.

So he sends out these 70 into Galilee, into probably a fairly cosmopolitan area of Galilee. But his ultimate objective is far wider than Galilee.

[8 : 10] His ultimate aim and objective is the world. And in a way I think this sending of the 70 is preliminary. It's a practice. He's getting them used to the idea.

But one day when he is resurrected, he will send them out into all the world. You will be my disciples in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Go and make disciples of all nations.

That's the vision of Jesus. The world. And that is the vision of our Father in heaven. That is the vision of the God we worship. And that is the vision of the whole of Scripture, as I understand it.

That the whole of Scripture is concerned with God's love for every single person in this world. Because he made us all and cares for us all. He chose Abraham to bless all the peoples of the earth.

That's what he said repeatedly to the patriarchs. He chose the nation of Israel to be a light, an example, a holy people, a witness to all the peoples of the earth.

[9 : 11] He sent his son to be the savior of all the earth. I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me, he said. And he gave his Holy Spirit. Not just that we might feel his presence and rejoice in our hearts, but that we might have the ability to take the gospel to all the world.

So the Bible ends then, in the book of Revelation, with a picture of heaven, and there is God in heaven. And the Lord Jesus Christ on the right-hand side, and around that throne, it says, people from every corner of the earth, from every tribe and tongue and nation.

That's the vision of the Bible, as I understand it. And that's the vision of Jesus, that all the earth might be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. So then, if that is the vision of Jesus, it is encouraging, isn't it, today, to see that vision being realized?

And I find it encouraging to go around different parts of the world and see how the church is growing. I've mentioned Nigeria. Actually, somebody in the World Council of Churches said about 50 years ago, the church in Africa may die, because it's only 10%, and with Islam and with communism, well, perhaps it hasn't got much hope.

Well, there are 350 million Christians today in Africa. The church in Africa has not died. In China, 50 years ago, when there was the communist takeover of China, there were about a million Christians, according to government statistics.

[10 : 55] Today, in China, there are between 70 and 80 million Christians. The church in China has not died.

In Nepal, 50 years ago, there were maybe, well, some say there was not a single Christian. Today, perhaps there are half a million believers in Nepal. Philippines, 5,000 evangelical churches about 30 years ago.

Today, there are 50,000 evangelical churches in the Philippines. And the Filipino Christians that are not satisfied with that are longing to double that number in the next 10 years.

In Singapore, the number of Christians has doubled in the last 20 years to about 14% of the population. So, there is much to encourage us. We do struggle, don't we, sometimes as Anglicans?

It's good, you know, to just look outside our own sort of countries. I feel the same about England and see where the church is growing. And I think I've got to say that where the church is growing, and this is particularly true of Anglicans, where the church is growing in the world is where Anglican Christians are being faithful to biblical teaching.

[12 : 12] And where we disregard biblical teaching, the church dies. You haven't got to be a brilliant historian or sociologist to observe that. So, there is much to encourage us, but there's no room for complacency.

And I'm sure you feel that here in Canada. Because there are so many who do not believe, and there are so many who have not heard. There are still 1.2 billion people in China who do not know Jesus.

And every one of those is precious to Him. There are over a billion Muslims in the world, and they have never, for all their sincerity that many Muslims have, they have never understood grace. They've never understood the concept of God's love.

They've never realized that they can call God Father. People who've never heard. People who have no Christians nearby.

People who have no church. And the vision of Jesus is to reach the world. Well, then, whose task is it?

[13 : 18] Well, it's yours. It's nobody else's. We can't say, oh, well, we have too much to do here in Vancouver. Leave it to somebody else.

What happens if everybody says that? The Great Commission is the responsibility of every single disciple of Jesus Christ. Every fellowship, every congregation. So, therefore, we have, all of us, a responsibility for our locality, and we also have a global responsibility.

The vision of Jesus is to reach the world. Well, then, secondly, who are the people that Jesus sends out? Who are these 70? Well, let's look at the text.

What does it tell us? After this, the Lord appointed 70 others. That's all it says. Not terribly helpful. They're just others.

Are you an other? They're not the apostles. They're other than the 12. He sends out the 12 in chapter 9. He sends out others in chapter 10.

[14 : 21] These are not, Peter, Andrew, James, John. They are just ordinary disciples of Jesus. They are not well known. They are not leaders.

Their names are not given. And I see them as a picture of every single Christian, every believer. Ordinary. Weak, perhaps, because Jesus sends them in teams.

He didn't think they could cope by themselves. Jesus compels them. I don't think they wanted to go. In fact, it says in verse 2, pray the Lord of the harvest will compel.

It's a very strong word in Greek. Will compel them to get ordinary, weak, reluctant people like you and me.

those are the kinds of people that Jesus uses because he hasn't actually got any others. He hasn't got any super saints.

[15 : 24] He hasn't got any terribly holy people. He's only got ordinary people. And he sends then every Christian out. All of us who were in St.

John's this morning. And for most of us, your calling is to stay living right where you are, doing the job that you are doing to the best of your ability and thereby glorifying God, seeking by your character and your relationships to reflect something of the character of Jesus and praying that from time to time there will be opportunities to witness to what Jesus Christ means to you.

That is your calling and there is no higher calling. That is the highest calling a Christian can have. Now some people God calls to be pastors and evangelists and missionaries because he can't think what else to do with them.

They are not more special than you. They are not more holy. They have exactly the same struggles and fears and temptations that you do. But Jesus sends them out into the world.

And what I find exciting is in the last 30 or 40 years how God is sending out into the world not just Caucasians from Canada. We have about 120 Canadians in OMF.

[16 : 49] Not just from Canada and America and England and Germany and Australia but from Korea and from Hong Kong and from Thailand and Malaysia. And it's so exciting I find to work in a mission where there are people from all over the world every part of God's family working together.

And we're finding increasingly in our courses for new missionary candidates that 75-80% of those now offering for mission are Asians either Asians living here in Canada or in America or England or Asians still living in Asia.

God uses both doesn't he? And there are particular things which white people can do. English teaching in China is an incredible open door. We could have hundreds probably thousands of English teachers in China.

And there are things which Asians can do which we Caucasians can't ministering to Christians teaching house church leaders and so on. Tremendous opportunities.

God is sending out people from all over the world. In the Philippines their ambition was to send out 2,000 cross-cultural missionaries by the year 2000.

[18 : 08] They failed. They sent out 3,000. Korea has sent out more than 10,000 missionaries worldwide. They are highly professional, well-qualified, most of them are university graduates.

And they're making a great impact for Christ. Praise God for what he's doing. Pray that he will continue to send out from your church people to serve Christ.

But remember that those you send out are just like the rest of us, ordinary, weak, reluctant people. But those are the people that Jesus uses.

Thirdly, what is the task that Jesus gives these 70? if you look to verse 9, I think we need to ask the question, is this the task that Jesus gives to us today?

I think, as I understand the Bible, this reflects the whole teaching of the Bible, of God's concern for his world. Jesus says in verse 9, heal the sick and tell them the kingdom of God has come.

[19 : 27] And the RSV, heal the sick in it and say to them the kingdom of God has come near you. There are two components in the task that Jesus gives.

The first component is to heal the sick and that's what they did by the power of God. And in the book of Acts, occasionally, by the gracious power of God, they perform miracles.

And there were other ways also in which they showed care for the needy, for the marginalized, for the deprived, for the hungry.

Care, Jesus said. For he was always full of compassion, wasn't he? And whenever he saw people who were hungry or people who were sick or people who were marginalized in society, he reached out with his compassion.

And he says, then, you are to be like that. Reflect my compassion. Well, what a world we need in, what we live in of desperate need.

[20 : 35] A hundred million children living on the streets of the cities of our world without parental love care or homes. Ten million children driven into child prostitution.

Thirty-five thousand children dying every day from malnutrition. And if it was your son, or my son, or your daughter, or my daughter, then we would feel their pain.

I was in Nigeria with a doctor in a hundred bed hospital. he was the only doctor. And we stood by a bed as someone died. And as he died, his wife, now a widow, was crying outside and the doctor was in tears and he said, I cannot cope as one doctor in a hospital of a hundred beds.

There's enormous physical need in our world, isn't there? And the challenge then comes to Christian doctors and teachers and agriculturalists.

Will you use your skills to go to other parts of the world that are so much more needy? Jesus told the parable of a good Samaritan and the man was, you know, beaten on the road going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

[22 : 02] And there he is, half beaten, lying, half dead on the road. And the people who passed by were the religious people? The people who said they loved God.

The people who loved the Bible of their day. And they passed by. We are to be a compassionate people. That's the first component, Jesus says, care for people's physical needs. And then he says, secondly, tell them the kingdom of God has come near.

Our task is not just to meet social need, though it is that. We should be, I mean, God's people should be foremost, shouldn't they? In meeting the physical needs of our world and showing compassion.

But it's not just that. Jesus then says, tell them the kingdom of God has come. Because the king has come.

And he is God, creator. That is the baby who was born in Bethlehem. Lo, within the manger lies he who built the starry skies.

[23 : 07] He is creator. He is king of all. He is lord of all. And he will one day judge all.

Every knee shall, that's what Philippians says, every tongue shall confess, every knee shall bow. That is what we have sung. That is the savior that we have worshipped this morning.

That is what we have declared in the creed. So do we believe that? Do we believe that in our post-modern relativistic society?

In our pluralist world? Oh, how much sensitivity we need as Christians. How much humility we need as Christians because we do not have all the answers.

We only know what God has told us in his word. How much we can learn from people of other backgrounds and other cultures.

[24 : 13] And having worked amongst Jewish people, I know how much my life has been enriched by Jewish friends. We need great humility and sensitivity. But never let us lose our confidence in who Jesus is.

And somehow as Christians, we've got to find a way of holding intention, humility, and confidence in the gospel. And obedience to the Great Commission.

We were often asked, why do you work amongst Jewish people as we did for eight years? That's quite a sensitive question. And I would say, we worked amongst Jewish people because actually Jesus was Jewish.

He came first for his people. He will say, you will call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.

We went to Jewish people because Jesus told to go to everybody. We also went to Jewish people because of what they find in Jesus.

[25 : 29] You know, the difference that Jesus makes. When you're talking about this, we're not talking theory. We are talking reality. I just am so moved to meet Jewish people and they say, I realize that in Jesus I find forgiveness and I never had that sense of forgiveness.

I realize that in Jesus I know that I will live with him by his grace forever. I find that in Jesus I now have a personal relationship to God.

As one Jewish person said to me, I have found what my father and grandfather were looking for. I now know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Don't let's theorize when we're talking about comparative religion.

Jesus has given us a job to do. It is to care for the sick, to care for people's physical needs, to demonstrate the love of God practically, but also to declare the gospel.

And we've got to hold those two things together. Finally, what were the demands that Jesus makes? well, he makes quite far-reaching demands, doesn't he, on these 70 that he sends out.

[26 : 44] If you look at verses 3 and 4, it says, I send you out as lambs among wolves, do not take a purse or bag or sandals, do not greet anyone on the way.

He says, you have to be willing for suffering. That's a very graphic picture, a lamb among wolves.

He asks that you are willing to suffer because you follow Jesus, to make yourself vulnerable.

I know you have some problems within the diocese, within the whole Anglican communion. I think one of the hardest things we face is trying to be faithful to scripture, and the pain and the difficulty there is in doing that.

For some, of course, it means physical suffering and Bill Fitchy, who is the Canadian director of OMF, lives in Toronto. His brother was shot in Thailand in the 80s because as a missionary, he and others were being too successful in telling people about Jesus.

[28 : 06] That was the price he was willing to make. Lambs among wolves. Jesus said, learn to live simply.

Take no bag or purse or sandals. I'm not sure he's saying we should never take a suitcase and check it in at the airport. But I think there is a biblical principle here about simplicity of lifestyle.

I think there is a constant reminder to us in scripture that this world is not our home. and there is a constant struggle for us isn't there as Christians to fight against the pressures of materialism and consumerism.

And to ask ourselves as we look at the poverty in the world, do I really need that? To learn to live simply that I might help others more. And then Jesus also asked for single-mindedness for he asked these people not to greet anyone on the way, which seems a strange way to go about evangelism.

Until one realizes that he gives them a specific task, go to that city, do not get distracted. And Jesus is looking for people who will not be distracted.

[29 : 15] He is looking for people who are willing to be focused in their acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord, who are willing to recognize that in every area of their lives and in every decision they make in life, where they live, what career they follow, first they seek his will, because they are radical disciples, and the Christians who will turn the world upside down are Christians who are willing to be radical.

And you see, Jesus gave us the example, that's what Philippians 2 is all about. He gave up everything in heaven with his father, and was born in a poor home amongst a despised people in an occupied country.

And he said, that's my example. And then he went to the cross, and he says, if you want to be my disciple, take up your cross.

Jesus has, which we should all have, local and global.

Here are the people he uses, all of us. Here's the task he gives us, to care and to share the good news. And here's the price he asks us to pay.

[30 : 50] It's great to be with you, and I pray that as a church, God will help each of you to fulfill your role, your task.

Christ. But also that you will send out more people from St. John's, into all our needy world.

For Jesus says the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. The stage is ready.

Many players have yet to arrive. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for the fact that you made us and you love us.

we thank you that you call us to be your children. We thank you that you use us. And Lord, we pray that in spite of our weaknesses and our failures and our reluctance, that you will use each of us to play our little part in the extension of your kingdom.

[32 : 31] help us to be willing to be vulnerable. Help us to be willing to make sacrifices. Help us to be focused people.

That your kingdom may come. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.