

SERMON PREACHED AT SYNOD 2018 BY THE VERY REV. LEROY A. JOHNSON

MISSIONARY SERVICE

If at points I come across as an echo for the two Bishops – receive it at divine will, since any attempt to focus on Intentional Discipleship must run across the same general lines.

I would like to invite us each to attempt to respond to the question: “What should a Mission Shaped Church look like?” Take a moment and paint your own picture.

It is critical, I believe, that every baptized person be schooled into a careful understanding of mission – since mission not only describes everything the Church is sent into the world to do, but it is also a mandate of our baptism.

Mission embraces the Church’s double vocation of service – to be salt of the earth and light of the world. Hence my text for today is Matt. 5:13-16 – Jesus said “You are the salt of the earth vss 14-16; you are the light of the world.....a city set on a hill cannot be hidden.....” So in this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus referred to His followers as salt and light - two very important elements which our existence relies on.

Salt - according to the Interpreters’ Bible Commentary –was greatly valued in the time of Jesus. In the climate of Palestine it was indispensable for the preservation of food. A bag of salt was reckoned as precious as a man’s life. Thus “Salt of the earth” is no mean title at all. We stand amazed that Jesus should thus exhort His disciples. Salt gives zest to food; in the same way disciples of Christ are supposed to add joy to the common day. Salt is very unassuming when blended into other products, yet undeniably effective. So Jesus challenged His disciples to impact the world for good – otherwise running the risk of losing their saltiness by being influenced by the world’s negative forces.

As light dispels, illuminates, guides – so must the followers of Jesus shine as a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden – challenging, inspiring and being sign posts – pointing others to the chief end of humanity’s search – God.

According to John Stott in his book, “Christian Mission in the Modern World”, three considerations must be borne in mind when we think of the relationship between evangelism and social action – the two fold vocation highlighted by mission.

1. Firstly he said that although winning converts is the primary end of evangelism, social action can prove to be a very useful means to this end. As someone says “A hungry man has no ear as he can only think of food, at that point he is not interested in the Church handing him any religious tract – as has been demonstrated at St. George’s. So social action can be a useful tool of evangelism as well.
2. Secondly, John Stott said that social action is not only a useful tool for evangelism, but can be seen as a manifestation of evangelism or of the gospel. One might almost say here that social

action is the sacrament of evangelism for it makes the message significantly visible. Jesus did not only announce the Good News of the Kingdom, He performed visible signs of the Kingdom. In John 14:11 He said to some of His skeptics, "If you don't believe then believe for the very works themselves.

3. Thirdly He said – social action should be seen as the partner of evangelism. As partners the two belong to each other and yet are independent of each other. Weight is one and a means to each other, for each is an end in itself. Both being expressions of unfeigned love.

It would seem then that in referring to His followers as salt and light of the earth and world, by extension He is saying to us today that we have to think and operate broadly as we exercise our vocation - which is supposed to be a part of the D.N.A. of every Christian.

The Swiss theologian Emil Brunner is quoted as saying "The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning".

So assuming the two fold vocaitn of Mission by the text – we now ask the question again at the very beginning – "What should a mission shaped church look like?"

I would suggest –

1. Firstly a Mission Shaped Church must reflect a leadership that is surrendered to the lordship of Christ, excited about sharing the good news, and equipped to train or facilitate other toward similar expressions.

Churches tend to reflect the priorities of their leaders whenever the leadership is enthusiastic about mission, there is a good chance that the church will catch the vision. In an ideal situation the leadership will be committed to seeing all of church life exposed to mission which rescues mission from being simple the responsibility of the Committee or a select group. Congregations do know when the leaders are excited about mission or are just buying time – going through the motions.

The people we appoint to head organizations or to serve on the Church Committee year after year sometimes raise some serious questions; because from my vantage point some of these people have no salt in themselves and their light is blurred because they do not engage in some of these activities geared towards their own spiritual growth - Corporate Bible Study; Prayer meetings; Retreats, etc. These persons more often than not will only act as blind leading blind because you cannot give what you do not possess, cannot lead to where have not been. They will view their mission through their own lens and limited abilities. They will not see the need in havin gseiour meaningful devotions before meetings, and often times come across as dry however eloquent or educated they might be. So watch your criteria for selecting leaders – their own relationship with Christ and interest show in fuelling passion will be critical for fruitful discipleship to happen.

2. A mission shaped church considers a clearly outlined Vision Plan with measurable goals and with everyone on the same page, being in place as being important (Fail to plan you plan to fail. You have to plan strategically).
3. A mission shaped church adopts an inter generational approach to its engagement of people (Sports evangelism – some persons never saw it as a mission)'; meeting people where they are – physically, spiritually, mentally, educationally. Mohammed may have to go to the mountain. We must be prepared to identify with people's struggles, pain; we must become wounded healers as Henry Nouwen says "If we are to come across as sincere and convincing."
4. A mission minded church seeks to prepare its members to be able to make the connection between their Christian life, gifts, and their witness in the world. This will mean that we view all of life as sacred rather than compartmentalized into secular and sacred. So when you become the Christian Teacher, Doctor, Banker, Politician, Business person, Neighbour – like salt and light you are prepared to use your influence for the greater good of such environment in which you live and move and have your being.

Seven whole days not one in seven (that's how Jamaica's problems are going to be solved – spending the time) We are not short of gifts, we are not short of ideas, or the right structures to engage in serious mission. We have been called and empowered. What we lack in too many places is the level of commitment and intentionality required to cause the meaningful impact desired to take place.

Let the members of Synod 2018 resolve to be the nucleus of positive change - change that the Diocese needs - by resolving to deepen our own commitment to Christ to tell our story. Not the so trained Anglicans some of us are – that make 's us God's frozen people – but instead being opened to the flow of the Holy Spirit. Let go and Let God have His way with us – as salt and light - His Ambassadors.

DUB

Beacon – oh yes a beacon

An analogy to fit the Christians

The testimony of our salvation is our light that shines like a beacon.

We have to shine all through the night

That the world may see it bright

For the hope of the world are the beacons.

Sing – YOU CANT BE A BEACON IF YOU DON'T SHINE.....

This world is in chaos and darkness

One hardly receive real justice

People live so cold and selfish

Often our true self image gets tarnished

Now the Christians have to try

To teach men how to live and die

For the hope of the world are the beacons.

CHORUS: YOU CANT BE A BEACON IF YOU DON'T SHINE.....

Intentionality the name of the game

If you don't witness – who you gonna blame

You be zealous – you aint sick – you aint lame

Shout the good news in Jesus name

You are called, empowered spirit led

With manna from God you're fed

Put in the work – let it never be said

That the Anglicans are cold and dead.

CHORUS: YOU CANT BE A BEACON IF YOU DON'T SHINE.....