

Missional: training all Christians to communicate the Gospel wherever they are

Values: what makes us tick

Today's sermon: slightly different from usual, but don't panic.

Missionary friend who lives in a country where while it's not officially illegal to be a Christian, it's not particularly approved of, and most people are more or less against claims of Christianity about Jesus. So I say he's a missionary, true that he is supported by Christians to be there, watched his life, you would think he was a language student and English teacher. Because of the culture, his route is not to start a church and hope that people come, in that totally unChristianised culture, no one would come.

His aim is to, along with some other Christians, get to know people, live out the Christian convictions and talk about Jesus as he shares his life. Eventually he might ask a friend or some friends to read the Bible with him – and see where he goes from there – he's been there for 6 months and isn't at that stage yet.

Missionary, actually just doing stuff that most normal people do – but because Christians are praying for and supporting him, there with an agency, intentional, trying to start reaching out to people – is his aim, always on his mind.

Very sensible, probably what we would do if we were in that culture.

Here's the news.

We are in that culture. A culture that is majority not Christian, most people are more or less against the claims of Jesus.

It's easy to kid ourselves that we are not. 2 Christian cathedrals within spitting distance of here.

No offence to people who go there (cathedrals doing best job of using our heritage to reach people) that those buildings are Relics of our heritage, now past, where most people had a Christian view of the world.

Bombed out church - centre for outdoor cinema and art exhibitions is a much more fitting picture culture's view of the Christian faith –cultural artefact like films and sculpture.

Here from another country and surprised to hear me say that Britain is not a Christian country. Certainly the philosophy, view of the world that has had the most effect on our nation's culture over 1000 years.

Christianity essentially a message about a personal trust – decision you make yourself to trust rely on Jesus, not a set of morals for a nation to follow. If that ever was the case (not sure) in Britain certainly not now.

Something big has changed last 50 years – Christian morals built on, institutions of society pushed out non-Christian belief and behaviour. Culture was Christianised, although many people probably did not have that personal trust. Lots of great Christian values we should be thankful for.

Job of the real church then – communities of people with that personal faith was to challenge people who signed up to Christian basics and morality to personally repent and trust Jesus. Still the same in some places in the world – doing a membership interview with someone from a central African country and that is exactly how they described becoming a Christian – lived with Christian morality and personally challenged to trust Jesus. How my grandmother became a Christian – always a churchgoer, but converted to know Jesus when she was in her 20s.

Not where WE live now.

2007 (decline in church continues) - 66% of UK adults have absolutely no connection with a church at all. Most of those are totally closed to coming church. Less than 10% attend regularly. Decline has slowed due to immigration – one of the many reasons from another country we are very glad to welcome you. 6% people and growing who adhere to other faiths. Especially true in cities.

Gloomy – the world is going to hell in a handbasket. Guardian and the BBC.

Situation, where Christianity was institutionalised was no golden age. I'm not sure if was good for us to be the "establishment".

Tricky to identify the radical teacher Jesus who didn't even own a home, , in the influence over government church sought. In the pomp of performing a Royal Wedding, flowing purple robes and bishops living in palaces. Advantage was meant common understanding to talk about Jesus, understood what we meant by God, sin – but morality without Gospel changed hearts often led to cruelty and hypocrisy.

"Christian" governments have persecuted and tortured gay community. Demonised people of other religions especially Jews. Worst of all – Jesus who always took the side of the weak and downtrodden, church failed to speak out against abuses of power in attempt to keep its ruling position.

So if the way our culture is now looks depressing, I find it hard to be sad.

Actually an opportunity for people who know Jesus to really live out the faith that he and his first followers taught – church to be genuine statement of what it means to have experienced God’s grace, family – not attached to government influence its moral will through buildings and ceremonies but to teach and model grace in every area of their lives, amongst people who don’t know. Means we can no longer retreat into doing Christian stuff always with other Christians, whilst telling everyone else they have to behave right. We have to go into the world and live out and speak out what we believe. Good our culture gives us that chance - in our readings today, what Jesus commands us to do. Missional church – means committed to not just putting stuff on and hoping people who already kind of Christianised come in – those people welcome. Committed to making us all into missionaries so that 66% people and growing have some connection with a Christian who is able to authentically live out and talk about their faith, even though those people start with little or no respect with church as an institution.

In the culture we are now, no room for Christians who are actually just socially conservative using religion to protect their comfortable middle class way of life, blame other people for evil in the world.

Jesus message is now counter-cultural only way its going to move out is by Christians who are able to both reflect its truth authentically in their lives and communicate it to people who don’t speak the same spiritual language.

2 passages – 2 great commissions, commands from God – I want to say that where we are in our culture now makes obeying them more challenging, we now have a unique chance to obey them.

The first great command:

Here’s a problem that I think that a lot of people who aren’t Christians have with us. We go on about Jesus meaning we can be restored to God, bring life to the full, knowing God. Actually, it seems to them, we live the same way as they do, stop all the interesting stuff, and add in a group of activities that seem pretty boring. Same as them only, largely, busier, with things they don’t see as very appealing.

All sorts of reasons for that, one of them is that our view of the Christian life is basically that. So I’m doing what I would always done apart from a few less immoral things. Extra spiritual bit of my life that I add on Sunday morning, reading the Bible and prayer. Essentially separate from my normal life, more about getting into heaven when I die.

Our problem, we have misunderstood what the message about Jesus is supposed to do for us.

Genesis 1, this passage talks about what God actually made people to do. He created them in his image – to be his representatives in the world he created. Notice they were to rule in the world – only person up till then who has ruled is God. Reflect what he is like in his world.

Help me Obi Wan Kenobi, you’re my only hope. Holo message of Princess Leah to communicate about herself to Obi Wan.

People’s job – to communicate to creation what God his like. Deputy Prime Ministers, but perhaps nowadays unfortunate image.

Way they are to rule like God is to fill the earth and subdue it. Christian movements which basically said we should all move to the countryside and take up hippy farming, commune with God.

Not the Christian view. People put on the earth to subdue it, to fill it, to create buildings and cities and culture. Bible starts with a garden and ends with a city.

God said go and create like me, extending my perfect rule in the art you draw, fields you plough, buildings you make. Fully human, reflect God’s image not in some prissy moral disconnected way from the world, but to extend his creative rule by being involved in his creation.

After people rebel against God, they continue in making culture, strange mixture of beauty and barbarity, show God’s image and their rejection of him – Genesis 4 see the first musicians, first farmers, first builders and also first mass murderer. Creating culture with marks of God’s creativity, deep scars of our rebellion.

Jesus arrives. One of the ways we most often talk about Jesus is that he came to save us – that is save us from God’s anger which we face for rejection of him. Gloriously true.

Jesus did more even than that – one of the ways that the Bible talks about his work is to renew in us, the image of our creator. Jesus came to restore us to full humanity – right with God we can then begin to again be his image bearer sending a message to the world that he is there. More important now because so much of the world doesn’t know what he is like.

So – Jesus did not come to give us a ticket to heaven – ignored till we get there. Not what “saved” means. Neither did he come to add a spiritual Sunday dimension to life, where you get to come and be comforted and centre, and then as you were before the rest of the week.

Restore you to being God’s imager, God’s holo message to the world about his character in whatever area you find yourself

working or living. Instead of adding a spiritual bit to your life, Jesus has saved so you so that all of your life, whatever culture you create – in a family, in a workplace, sports team, hospital, art gallery, it's about displaying his character. Christians have written theologies about work, food, sleep. Image God everywhere.

2 examples Art, academic or creative art. Expressing what is in you, self expression. Self expression impossible – no such things as even expression. Christian artist image God, by displaying something that is real or true, that expresses meaning, doesn't give in to the counsel of despair that there is only endless layers of chaos comes from within us.

Medicine. Of course we image God, help to heal people. Doctors – sort of modern day Jesus's. True. Possible to be the type of medic for whom that isn't the important thing at all.

Known as someone who wants to be the best. Reputation –not imaging God in self giving love, but promoting myself as the best in my field. Imaging God means genuinely using what you have to serve others not to promote yourself and your career, your glory. That's what it means, objectively, to be a good doctor. IME, medics stressed mostly about what other medics will think. For you to work out and me to help.

One other implication of this truth. God actually gives this command to humanity again after they have sinned, in Genesis 6. People still image of God, scarred by sin – glorious ruins. In the image of God – glorious. Marred by rebelling against God – ruins. People still create culture which, though often marred and evil and spoiled by sin, has echoes of God's image in it. That means we don't have to withdraw or remove ourselves from everything that isn't Christian, assuming we are better. We shouldn't do that – certainly not on the basis that I'm now a good Christian and everything of the world is bad. Where someone who isn't a Christian creates a beautiful piece of music, wonderful gift of God. People who aren't Christians help those who are weak and needy, reflecting their creation as a God hologram even where they reject that truth.

Question sometimes asked: Why don't we start a ministry to help this group of people?

Number of people who have left our church quoting that very reason – don't run a ministry for this or that group of needy people.

Most of the time in the city like Liverpool, strong social conscience, someone is already helping that group of people. Encourage you to get involved with that group – doesn't have to be run by Christians to be good. Brilliant groups serving the homeless. Lots of people doing stuff with refugees. Care for and create equality for the disabled. From our church should

be (and are) involved in all those things, doesn't have to be run by Christians to be good – people still often display the image of God that is left in them. Speaking to someone from Evangelical Alliance about this – saying no you should run ministries which double up what others are doing with a Christian banner, so people are impressed with the church. To which I want to say, imaging God is about serving people not self promotion, we'll talk about that next week.

Joining in with people with whom we don't agree about everything may make life more complicated – have to do some thinking about what it means to image God there, may be things you can't sign up to – horror of horrors, deal with points of view you don't agree with, and explain a Christian view of the world to people who aren't Christians. Wouldn't that be terrible?

Not according to Jesus. We are about to get to the second great command. Far from overruling the first command to make culture, especially now where most of the people we know will not come trooping through the doors to hear about Jesus – this command to go and tell fits inside the command to go and subdue.

Before we get there, some deep thinking and some light relief.

How did we get into this situation, where so many Christians think that what they believe, spiritually has no effect on the actual physical reality of how they live.

Soaked in something else that is going on around us.

Ever wondered why, in English you are allowed to read a poem, and say what you think of it, and people will say, yes that's very interesting interpretation. Blackberry picking is about sex.

Soon discover to your cost, that you can't do that in Maths. See an equation, there is an answer. Try to pass Maths exams by saying, yes that's your interpretation. Mine is this.

English department and announce that Shakespeare was a feminist – a philosophy that didn't exist till after he was dead, and everyone will nod at your wisdom. Head round the physics department and say E doesn't equal MC squared, see what happens.

Explain to a friend that you really think Jesus is real, actually rose from the dead, and they say – that's fine for you to believe that but not for me.

Trend in Western culture, to say 2 different types of knowledge. Facts, which can be proved by science. Neutral, secular, unbiased. Therefore can apply to everyone we don't question that.

What about things that are important that can't be scientifically proven? Love, morality.

Values, but they are personal. True for you.

Diagram: Science gets the bottom, binding place, humanities gets the top subjective personal space.

Scientifically true only way things are binding on everyone. Morality, creativity, personal. Society's view of religion, that it belongs upstairs, in the personal value section. You can't scientifically prove Jesus rose from the dead, therefore that has nothing to do with anything except in your private world.

You dare not confuse the categories. (Clip)

Not a debate about evolution. Reason that's funny is because Phoebe is confusing the categories. Spirituality put up with your strange beliefs, personal, you cannot question what is public fact and truth. It's not for you to buy, it's fact. Your friend says – it's right for you, not for me, they are hearing you up there, in values. Religion belongs. Don't try saying that about something scientific. Two types of truth. This evening more about addressing that with non-Christians.

Bought into the same thing. Secular public world, not allowed to bring my faith to bear on anything. Private.

Spiritual side and it is important to me, rules created by the world operate when I am outside a Christian environment. Medics feel like I have been harsh – promote yourself not serve others, how you get on in hospital. Service thing applies in church, with Christians.

I'm afraid Jesus won't have it. Matthew 28: 18 – all authority in heaven and earth is given to me. Big claim. I am in charge of everything. That is the claim you accepted if you ever became a Christian. That means he demands to have something to do with, controlling interest, in everything in your life. Abraham Kuyper, Jesus says all of it is mine. Effects what you decide to do, how you behave, what you think about your studies. All authority is his. God imager in everything that you do.

Dissing science I'm not. Many of the scientists who started using what we call the scientific method did that because they assumed there was a rational God behind creation – drop an apple now and here behave the same way in a different place and time.

Not buy the divide between personal faith and public fact. Jesus doesn't accept it. Also see here in Matthew 28 that Jesus says there is an implication to the fact all authority has been given to him: go. Unique place to be able to do that – because with 10% churchgoers, less than 3% identifying as attending an evangelical church we need to go.

Encourage you to think about getting involved with life of our city, theologically wrong and rather arrogant hangover from when Christians influenced everything to think only the church can do good things.

Go, make disciples, talk about Jesus is a direct command from Jesus himself. Get out there. Talk about him. Don't wait for people to come to you. Go. Image God, but with Gospel intentions.

Can you see that what we have been talking about, thinking through, living every area of your life imaging God rather than keeping it as a separate spiritual thing, doing that in the midst of the world that still displays God's image sometimes but rejects him find you have to explain how you live all the time. Undoubtedly you will experience some of the rejection and persecution, being passed over for promotions and not invited to every party. Jesus says to expect, do not want to make the mistake of some of those who went before us – not communicating about Jesus in order to protect our privilege so that doesn't happen to us.

Missional church. Believes that every person can image God in their work. Church that thinks joining in with other people better than starting something ourselves. Church that is, by God's grace, trying to train all Christians to communicate the Gospel wherever they are.