

May 19th 2013: On A Mission In Our World : Colossians 4:2-6

Just recently someone was sharing with me about a church they once attended where, during their Mission month, they erected a banner just in front of the exit doors from the worship area. Its message was simple yet so apt. "You are now entering the mission field."

Such a reminder about every Christian being a Missionary in the places where they live, work, and play is behind the title for my message this morning which is "On A Mission In Our World".

Paul explains this very well in 2 Corinthians 5:20 where he says

20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

He obviously chose that word 'Ambassador' very carefully. For even in Paul's day it referred to a most honoured position bestowed upon a high official by a sovereign, giving him or her the right to speak for their sovereign in another land and amongst another people.

So Paul is letting us know what a privileged and important mission we have been given by Jesus. But he is also letting us know that we should not expect it to be easy. For although we are to perform it in our own world, we don't belong to this world and the kingdom of darkness that controls it anymore.

We are new creations in Christ Jesus. Our citizenship is based now in heaven. We follow a whole different range of rules and expectations to those of others. Our views and our values on a large range of issues are drastically different and becoming more and more objectionable to those who do not follow Christ as we do.

I am at present reading a book called The Postmodern World and it particularly talks about the shift in societies understanding of Truth. That truth is no longer accepted as an absolute that applies to everyone, but something that can change from group to group. So Society now tells us that it is wrong for any group to say that they alone have The Truth.

But as Christians we do believe we have the Truth about God, about sin, about a coming judgment, about heaven and hell, and we preach that as applying to every person whether they accept it or not. But our postmodern

society now turns to us and tells us that such might be the truth for us but it is not the truth for the Moslems or the Jews or the Atheists or the non religious and we are intolerant if we suggest it is.

Paul's society was very similar in the sense that it believed in and tolerated many different ideas about gods and about ways that mankind could please them, and when Paul proclaimed that there was only One true God and only one way of salvation through Christ Jesus he was often abused and attacked. But that didn't stop him declaring on Mars Hill in Athens that (Acts 17:29-31)

since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

Now Greek Society was quite open to hearing new ideas so they didn't attack him physically for what he said, but many simply walked away basically saying "well that's the truth you believe but it's not the truth for us". And more and more people in our Society will tend to react in a similar fashion to us when we share the Good News of salvation with them, but such must never stop us doing so or cause us to water down our message. Instead it should cause us to rely more upon the power of God the Holy Spirit, for He alone can convict of sin, and follow more closely the directions about witnessing that passages like Colossians 4:2-6 give us.

The first is the importance of prayer: Colossians 4:2-4

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

This is a command for the church to continue to do what the early church did after Pentecost, when they devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. It is connected here strongly to our proclamation of the Gospel to others, for Paul asks them to pray in a similar way for his declaration of the Good News.

The point is that we will get nowhere with our evangelism if we don't take prayer seriously. We need to pray regularly and earnestly for those who we want to see come to Jesus. Author David Garland writes :-

"A church in a rural part of a rural state has experienced phenomenal growth and they attribute it to the Holy Spirit and their prayer ministry. The associate Pastor says, "God is doing some unbelievable things at Buck Run because His people are daring to open up the channel for the power of the Spirit to flow.....They are paying the price in prayer."

The second is the way we act towards the outsiders and how we use the opportunities that come our way. ..So we read inv5

5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

I have sometimes been targeted by Christians in the street who want to push their view of the Gospel on to me. They are loud, persistent, and highly opinionated and they put me off totally. They are not being wise.

Then there are those Christians who think about others and wait for the best opportunity to share a word or an act in the name of Jesus. They have the urgency to do so, but refuse to rush the process. They seek to establish the trust between them and the other person that will enable them to make the most use of the opportunities for them to speak a word in season. They are the wise ones.

I believe we seek to do that as a church through our food ministry. We provide cheaper food to those families who struggle financially and we make sure that they know we do it because we are children of the God who loves them. And each time we say something to them about God and we pray with them before they do their shopping, but we do so in a gracious way and I believe it gets through. (last Wednesday.....)

The third direction is about what we say. Sharing the Gospel is not just about using words. We all know that. It is about caring, about helping, and about loving our neighbours so that they see God's love for them in us. But at some point words are normally needed.

They don't have to be the total Gospel package. Just the words that the Lord gives you at the time. Indeed how you say it is as important as what you say according to v6

⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

By full of grace Paul means gracious. Words that are not given in a manner that attacks and annoys but still puts the message across. The contemporary English version says:

⁶ Be pleasant and hold their interest when you speak the message. Choose your words carefully and be ready to give answers to anyone who asks questions.

That readiness to give an answer suggests that a big part of sharing the Gospel is our response to the moving of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the ones we are speaking to. When He is at work we are met with interest rather than rebuttal. We know that He has been there before us preparing the way in answer to the prayers of God's people.

For in the end we are missionaries but we are never alone. God the Holy Spirit works with us, and when we are obedient to the call to share His word, however feeble we may think we are in doing so, we can have this confidence that He is at work through us doing much more than we could ever ask or imagine.

We leave this place to enter our Mission field. God has prepared us well to do so. Let us pray for the opportunity this week to partner the Holy Spirit in the process of spreading the Gospel to at least one other person.