**Stowe Parish Church: October 31st 2021**

**Mission**

When I saw the topic for this morning was mission I took a deep breath and wondered where I would start. At one level it could be about who I can share my faith with or how can I live out my life in a way that points others towards an encounter with Jesus. At another level mission is about God working His purposes out in His world and the church discerning where He is calling us to be part of that mission.

At another level it is about how a church can be mission focussed so it can continue Jesus’ ministry in our generation. So I have chosen two passages from Jesus’ ministry and one from the early church to try and get a glimpse of what might mission might involve.

Joe Paprocki in his book . Seven keys to Spiritual Wellness writes

“The God we seek is on fire, He has a mission and invites you and me to be part of it “

So what is God fired up about? Joe Paprocki thinks it is “selfless love expressed in mercy, compassion and justice”. These are key elements of being involved in God’s mission. Personally, and as church, giving ourselves in selfless love demonstrating God’s mercy, compassion and justice to the community God has called us to live in and serve

It is important to remember that God is a missionary God. Mission is rooted in the heart of God, that heart of love that led to His only son Jesus being sent to bring about forgiveness, healing and restoration. John 3 verse 16 reminds us that God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Two other quotes I saw add further pointers

God is *for* his world and is present within it, and that this must have an impact on the Church, for it is *this* God who ultimately gives shape to *his* Church.

God is *for* the healing of the world and that God is not an absentee landlord, but is *at work* in his world.

So we are called to join God in His mission of love, mercy, compassion and justice as God s plan of salvation unfolds and his kingdom breaks into this broken world.

So what does this mission look like for us ? What does it mean to be a mission shaped church?

It has been suggested that there are five strands to mission and these should be reflected in a mission shaped church, perhaps a simple way of starting to grasp mission.

**1) To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom** - **our** call to evangelism, the prime task of the church, bringing those who do not know God into a relationship with him through Jesus.

**2 ) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers** - this is the mission Jesus set out before His disciples

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and the Holy Spirit , teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you “

To be disciple making disciples: growing God’s people to serve Him in the broken world and help others come to know Jesus. This is where small groups studying God’s word and praying for each other are vital.

**3) To respond to human need and set people free through loving service -** the gospel message will always contain an element of social action: mission involves meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of those in our community. The Food Bank, which I know you support, believes the need for food is a sign that there are other problems that need to be met. So we work with other care agencies to ensure we see the people in need holistically and the church is also reaching out. There is a group now running called Rebound that is attended by families struggling to cope who have been reached via the Food Bank, showing them God’s love, caring for them and meeting their needs.

**4) To seek to transform unjust structures in society** - if we are to set people free to find God, or start on the journey to find God, then we must be aware of the many obstacles that get in the way, the devil loves to bind and blind people. We must not be afraid to tackle injustice when and where we see it but more about that in a moment.

**5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the** **life of the earth** – we cannot ignore what the Bible says about caring for God’s world, the world He created out of love and will in due course renew

With these strands on mind I want to share few thoughts on different aspects of mission through looking at the passages we have read this morning.

Hopefully as we look at these passages we will get a glimpse of mission is action

**John 4 verses 4 – 14**

Jesus is travelling through Samaria and is led to a well where he meets a Samaritan woman. It is noon and the woman is collecting water, not in the early morning as the other women in the town would have done. Her lifestyle had made her a social outcast: she comes on her own.

What follows is fascinating

Jesus does some surprising things

He breaks the social taboo of talking to a woman on her own in a place with no witnesses

He speaks to a Samaritan woman ignoring the 500 year old hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans. Jesus set aside all the bitterness of past history as he spoke with this Samaritan woman

Jesus does not allow the social norms of the day about who he should or shouldn’t speak to, get in the way of sharing the good news He has to offer

Jesus then asks her for a drink, another surprise especially for the Samaritan woman “How can you ask me for a drink?” she asks

Jesus opens the conversation asking her for help: being vulnerable to the vulnerable, making sharing easier.

This opens up a conversation which leads to Jesus gently talking with her about the problem that was causing her to be a social outcast, and led to the point where He offered her a new changed life, filled with the Spirit of God. He also told her the time was coming when Jew and Samaritan would worship as one people but we will come back to that in the Ephesians passage

It’s really interesting that we are told she ran back to the town without her water jar. She came with a jar looking for water but went back as a carrier herself, of the living water of the Spirit. And the result the town came out to hear Jesus themselves as they heard from this transformed woman. .

Here we see aspects of mission:

* Being led to a moment of encounter as Jesus was to that well. We need to be alert to God’s promptings as well, where is the well he wants us to visit?
* Not allowing social norms to get in the way of an encounter, being willing to share with anyone
* Being vulnerable to the vulnerable, being gentle as we share our faith. Build the relationship
* Sharing the good news in a way that meets the needs of the one encountered. Your own story s a good starting point.
* Showing love and mercy in a real way.

Here we see how important it is for people to have an encounter with Jesus which is central to mission. We in our own small way can learn from the way Jesus spoke to the woman as we seek to help those we encounter or whom God puts in our path to meet Jesus.

**Ephesians 2 verses 11 -22**

But there is the other aspect here which the passage from Ephesians highlights: the amazing statement Jesus made about Jews and Samaritans becoming one people. This points of course to the time after the cross, the resurrection and the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost. Paul’s dramatic conversion and His call by God to take the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles: his missionary journeys spreading this good news across the Gentile world which we looked at earlier this year. Here we see the words of Jesus to the woman at the well becoming a reality. But as we read in the Ephesians passage we see how difficult it was for Jews and Gentiles to become one, to become worshipers together.

Paul’s response “For Jesus himself is our peace, who had made the two groups one and has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility “

Mission was tough for Paul , this problem was huge yet he saw that in Jesus the call to be one people, reconciled, sharing God’s grace poured out on the cross, made it possible.

Part of mission is about breaking down the walls of hostility whatever they may be and we are called as church to be involved. There are many walls of hostility in our society; we just need to watch the news. Mission means being involved. Sometimes by action, often by prayer or supporting those Christians who are seeking to minister to those where division is blighting their lives, be it at work, in the community or in families.

Our final passage highlights yet another aspect of mission.

**Matthew 21 verses 12-15**

Jesus enters the Temple and enters via the Court of the Gentiles.

Here he is faced with a rowdy market scene with moneychangers at the heart. Animals were bought to offer as a sacrifice but only Tyrian coins can be used in the Temple so other currencies have to be changed and you can imagine the exchange rate rackets that existed. And worse all this going on in the market place was linked to the Priests, they condoned it and gained financially from the activity

Jesus is shocked how His Father’s House of Prayer had become a place of corruption, so far away from what the Temple was built for. People being cheated and their understanding of God shaped by all that was wrong. Such injustice was something Jesus was furious about and He acted in dramatic way, he cleared the Temple of this market place.

When the Bible talks about injustice it shines a light into those places where what is happening is far from God’s desire for His world and He weeps over those caught up in those situations. It also challenges our attitudes. Do we have deep concern, do we weep for example, for the poor, the outcast who cannot find their way to God because of the situation they find themselves in.

“I know the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy “Psalm 140

Do we like Jesus feel, angry when we see injustice? Where people are treated in a way that is a long way from how God wants them to be treated.

How do we respond? Another aspect, call to mission

So Jesus acted but look what he did next. He healed those that had come to the temple – these people met God in a powerful way.

What a contrast, market place to a place of love and healing.

So concluding our quick look at what mission might mean for us

We have touched on:

Being open to God and letting Him lead us to encounters so we can point others to that encounter with Jesus.

Believing God is working his purposes out and being willing to ask where I/we should be involved

Not being held back by social norms or expectations but being willing to speak, to meet with those who others have scorned

Seek a heart that weeps for injustice and longs to see people set free from what binds them and keeps them from seeking God.

Pray that walls of hostility in our society will be broken down .

We are all called to be part of God’s mission even in the smallest of ways

But as Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians whatever we do will be of little use if it is not done in love

God’s mission comes from a loving heart; all we do in mission must also be rooted in a loving heart. Even the smallest offering done with love will be honoured and used by God for the extension of His Kingdom.