

A gift from Colombia – Bishop Cardona’s sermon preached at Northstead on Sunday June 27th 2010

RETHINKING MISSION IN THE CHURCH OF TODAY

Throughout history there have been various interpretations of ‘mission’, all based on Holy Scriptures. But, it’s quite clear to all that many people act out of self-interest, this becomes evident in the way they always seek to benefit themselves rather than others. New, dark and evil trends start to emerge. In modern times we’ve only to look at the global financial crisis, which is reflected in a break-down of the whole of society.

Man’s lust for worldly power has always generated blindness, spiritual, social and sometimes even physical blindness. This is what makes the world a dark place. Crises create uncertainty and mistrust and some people directly suffer the consequences. The promises of change can be vain and deceitful, all very similar to the text that we read in Matthew 25.

But God sent us his Son, Who is the Light, "I am the way, the truth and the life." (Jn14:6). To reveal to us the truth and that truth is what sets us free. As a consequence we have **Life and Life in all its fullness!** (Jn 10: 10) But that truth is not the same for everyone; it becomes truth when it frees us from the darkness of sin, for others it has no effect. Human nature tends to be corrupt, because it usually seeks its own advantage, for this reason the Church also becomes darkened, because it is made up of humans too.

Let us look at the text that we read today. Jesus, on his throne of glory, brings us all together and divides us into two groups for judgement. Note that it is an ethical trial. What you have done for the little ones, is done for the Lord. The face of the little one who is hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick is the one who judges you. This is the trial which judges all nations, and also applies to the churches.

According to this trial, there is no other service to Jesus, the Son of Man; the King who comes in glory, apart from that which is made to a little-one. It’s the target, which sets as the redeeming ethical criteria, not religious observance but the deep spirituality of love. This service is given to the insignificant needy ones, not as retributive labour/duty but rather as unconditional love, as grace and justice. Scary! Now he has the final verdict ... he says, who is on the left, **will be** thrown into the eternal fire!!!

We immediately ask, ‘Why Lord? What’s going on? What’s gone wrong?’ Of course everyone responds in different ways, but it all leads to the same end. ‘I’ve tried to always be the best at everything, the smartest, fastest, strongest, most cunning, what did I do wrong?’ Others say, ‘But what have we done wrong? You throw us into the eternal fire but we care about the world, we create wars to control it and resolve the crises, we’ve had to work hard to develop good arms, to exert control that actually only a small group of us deserve credit for, we gave no space for the miserable masses to rise up and govern us’.

The more spiritual say, ‘As long as I’ve known you, I’ve committed myself to prayer and fasting, I turned my back on the world, I do not mix with sinners and I feel all your miraculous power inside myself’. After listening, the King will say, ‘Depart from me because you are not **"LOVE"** Jesus’ spirituality is based on his love for others, His HOLINESS for the care of the little ones.

This is where Church develops its mission **IN CARE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD.**

His Word says: If anyone says **<<I love God>>**, but hates his brother he is a liar, because if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God whom we have not seen? (1Jn: 4. 20). God becomes real in the widow, the orphan, the prisoner, in the naked, the sick, the hungry, in the migrant, the poor, the exploited children and in battered women ... But we do not see ... We are blind, darkness dominate us, and we do not recognize the real demons that govern us and control our humanity.

How many of us would be willing to free ourselves, to remove the bandage from our eyes and pay the price to develop Mission? That is when prayer and fasting are real, when we dignify our fellow human beings. As the Church, we must be part of God's project, or what the theologians call "the Mission Dei". But what is that mission? (Mt. 28. 20) says "...**Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.**"

The People of Israel expected a rich and powerful king, a warrior to free them from the Imperial Rule. But, Beloved People of the Lord, Here is a King with a crown of thorns, humble, who turns the other cheek. However, he also is a prophet who vigorously denounces the injustices that are occurring in the lives of the insignificant ones among the People of God, and offers a different world order. He announces the Good News.

This means that the Mission of the Church must be "prophetic" not about financial gain or politics, not merely religious, not psychological, manipulative, it must be Christ centred. The systems that have set those who believe to be superior have darkened the world's view of the Church. As Methodists, we are guided by the principles of grace and love, that lead us to holiness, some say, internal and external.

What I think is important, is simply HOLINESS, not being separated from one another, not trying to earn our way to salvation but knowing that we are loved by the Lord. To the Church come sinners, and it is in the Community of believers that we are strengthened by the Spirit to face the darkness of this world.

I firmly believe that anyone who has an encounter with Christ will never again be the same. I mean, those who encounter, meet at a deep and loving level, with a more needy brother or a sister, he/she meets with CHRIST.

How do we do Mission today? By loving your fellow, by seeing him/her as an equal. Look at the Walker of Galilee, crowds gathered, everyone followed him because he healed them, gave them peace and taught them, in short, He "**loved**" them.

Let's do Mission as he did it. The blind saw, (he showed them another chance at life) he resurrected people (who were excluded and battered), fed thousands (he filled them with hope), he healed wounds (put his love in them.) Also, he removed the Temple merchants, (telling us that things must change, that the old temple is no more, he built a new one).

These times demand a different mission, but not one that distorts the underlying principles, and only becomes visible when one prospers, or enters into a world detached from reality, enclosed by four walls with a selfish, individualistic, emotional and manipulative spirituality.

No ... God invites us to see him in all creation and that includes all of humanity; he invites us to learn to walk together as People of God, He walks among us, where throughout history he has been revealed in the community. ('Where two or more gathered in my name I'll be there').

The magic formula is to rethink mission to include everyone, just look with love on all our fellowmen. When you move out from these four walls, I think that is when we will make real the development of the Mission; if we could just take in this message. **Amen.**

Blessings,

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