



**LENT “BECOMING A MISSION SHAPED CHURCH”**  
**LENT 1 “Mission Impossible?”**

**Sunday Morning readings; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23, Matt 28:16-20**

**Introduction**

The Anglican Church worldwide is encountering strange times because in parts of the world it is shrinking, in fact to put it quite bluntly it's haemorrhaging beyond control. The churches in mainland Europe, Britain and North America are slowly dying with some small pockets of growth yet the churches in the global south, in Latin and South America and in Asia and Africa are exploding. Today there are more Anglicans in Nigeria than in Western Europe! The balance of power has shifted. But that's just the surface, in some ways it's just statistical. And we know there are lies, lies, and darn statistics. Statistics also tell us that 75% of South Africans are Christians yet the reality is quite different. South Africa is becoming/has become/will become post-Christian. South Africa certainly is a place of great religious diversity and tolerance. Something is shifting in many parts of the world. It's a cultural shift, a transition to where people aren't exactly sure what will come next. From modernism, starting in the early 1900s when the church adapted the liturgy to modern thought, and an age of great certainty to an age of doubt, of relativism – the belief that religion and ideas can differ between people and cultures, of the postmodern (whatever that means) and sometimes despair but of a new hope, a chance to re-imagine and re-shape whilst not losing our distinctiveness as Anglicans. A call for, what Archbishop Rowan Williams calls, 'a mixed economy', where the formal, liturgical forms can sit alongside the freer, improvised forms but always with the aim of bringing Jesus into the life of the church and all its peoples.

**How to get to understand culture**

- The ordained Clergy and most church leaders have been trained or understand how to study and teach the scriptures but very few of us have been trained or understand how to do the same for culture, to see culture not as a threat but an opportunity. As we think about our Church communities, perhaps we see them in a number of ways. Some of us think we know our community or the culture around us but actually we are misreading, we are blinded from those we wish not to see or encounter for whatever reason. “If you are going to impact the culture, you must first study the culture. Once you intentionally get to know the culture around you, you are able then to contextualize the gospel message so that it is understood as good news.” Remembering that culture is not static but dynamic and fluid. Communities are changing and often rapidly.
- We need to ask the question - The “who, when and where of culture?”

- We need to identify BARRIERS and discover BRIDGES
- There is to some extent a *crisis*. David Bosch, the South African theologian, reminds us that in Japanese there are two words, Danger and Opportunity, for the word *crisis*.

### Our Mission

More and more we find that people don't know **THE STORY**. The story of a Jewish boy who was born under a cloud of suspicion and mystery, became a carpenter in his family business and then one day announced, after his baptism by an even stranger desert prophet, that the Kingdom of God had finally come! People don't know the story of the birth, life, death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus. It's not part of the fabric of daily life anymore. It's an optional extra. It's a confused mish mash. It's one option in the great shopping mall of spirituality. Perhaps we feel, like the psalmist, "How can we sing when we're in a strange land?" (Ps 137:4)

The church, to some extent, has become a little club full of people who are like each other, providing a safe place away from the nasty cruel world when, in fact, God's intention is for the church to rise up and become the hands and feet of Jesus - to be partakers in the Mission of God. God is on a mission to bring those in the world into a renewed relationship with him and he created the church to partner with him but unfortunately some of us have fallen asleep. The *Missio Dei* is central to a real understanding of the theology of Mission. It can be encapsulated like this. **It's not the church that has a mission but the God of Mission who has a church.** The whole of scripture is about the mission of the Triune God. Scripture is pregnant with God's mission about God drawing men and women to himself. Chris Wright who wrote 'The Mission of God' says 'it's within the Godhead that mission starts. The Father sends the Son, the Father and Son commissioning and sending the Spirit in perfect unity. The Trinitarian life of the Godhead is the impetus for mission. It is modelled for us in the relational dance of the self sustaining life of Father, Son and Spirit.

[Read Matthew 28:16-20] In the life of Jesus and his disciples in the Gospels the mission of God was not a bolt on, optional extra. In some ways mission was **not** something they did. It was something **they were**. It was in the very DNA of the life of the early church. Baptising and teaching with the promise of God as Emmanuel; that God would be present in all they did. In this we see that, at the centre of mission, is the Spirit of God. Without the Spirit's presence all would be in vain. Notice that the concern in v17 is dealt with by the promise in v20b. Even after all they had witnessed there was very real fear, doubt and anxiety yet the spirit would come and empower them in ways they probably didn't even comprehend or certainly expect.

### An illustration

Some examples of learning about culture and fitting in with the local people can be shown from a Missionary's experience in Cambodia in South East Asia. Cambodian people like snacking. At every corner you will find someone cooking something over a charcoal fire, or frying something in a wok. Cambodians, like most Asians, are very open-minded when it comes to sources of protein. They most like snacking on journeys. A long bus or taxi ride. Whereas you or I might take some biltong, a packet of chips, some nik-naks and a coke, Cambodians will happily take a plastic bag filled with super sweet ice coffee and a bag of deep fried spiders pulling the legs off and happily munching them, or some lightly fried Jong rut (grass hoppers) or beetles, or cockroaches! Things that might make us feel deeply sick. We might even find ourselves scratching our heads and being deeply confused or maybe even angry for some bizarre reason. Things done differently are disturbing, confusing... 'it's just not right to eat that', 'it's just not right to do it like that.' In those sentences we reveal our own prejudice and cultural boundaries. We feel threatened by what appears to be abnormal. In a way this is part of knowing culture, being open to what is really going on and being creative enough to find a response.

To some extent this explains the problem of the church in relating to the prevailing culture. Either we want to but have no idea how to or maybe we don't want to because it looks so wrong outside of the doors of the church. The people outside are a bunch of weird spider eaters! Once they've changed their ways and become like us they can come in.

Using the 'How to get to understand culture' section on page two think about some of the following questions.

1. Think about your own community or parish. Consider doing a parish survey. Which of the following do you have in your area?

Hospital	School	Retirement home	Orphanage
Government office	Tertiary college	Shopping Mall	Pub/Schbeen
Informal settlement	Public recreation ground	Community centre	
Police station	Sports club	Taxi rank	

Describe the type of relationship the church has with each of these places? Do you know the Principal of the local school for instance? Think of three ways to reach out to one of the listed places. Make an effort to contact and build a relationship with one or two.

2. Find a map of your local parish. Who are the 'hidden' or 'marginalised' people in your parish? Discuss together which groups need support or attention. It might be refugees, single mothers, the unemployed youth or people with disabilities of some kind. Consider organising a service or outreach for a group you've identified in the run up to Easter.

3. Use your map to plan a prayer walk around the parish boundaries. You could walk in small groups stopping at significant places to pray. Also spend time as you walk looking out to see what's really happening on the ground.

### BIBLE STUDY

#### 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 (NIV)

For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! <sup>17</sup> If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. <sup>18</sup> What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel. <sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.

### BACKGROUND

Paul probably reached Corinth in AD 50. Corinth was a large and prosperous city and Paul spent an unusually long time with the Corinthian church. The church was made up of mostly Gentiles but with a handful of Jews. The instability of the Corinthian church is not surprising given the utterly anti-Christian religious and moral environment of the city.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why was Paul willing to 'make himself like a slave'? What was his prime motivation?
2. Paul was willing to give up his rights (for us perhaps the way we like things done, the comfort of our church environments) in order to see others coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus. In what ways do you see this happening in your church?
3. Think about what Paul might have had to do to reach those who were slaves, or Gentiles? Paul remember was a Jew. It meant some quite radical steps. What steps might you take to reach the outsiders in your community?