



Affirming each other's Ministry

Mark 3:14-15

An address of this kind is often a kind of charge at the beginning of a new year ... a reminder of our priorities:-

- Ministers and pastors are an obvious focus
- church leaders and elders are critical in offering their support
- for the whole church, as we gather ... it is a joint sense of ministry.

This is an opportunity for a new beginning. Whilst the summer can be a time of relaxation, for many – and for some of our ministers - it is a time of stress. Some are moving into retirement, many are moving appointments and some are taking on extra responsibilities or even beginning their ministry. We now anticipate a renewed, shared ministry in Christ. The coming year is a great time of opportunity

Let us be quite clear that, although we feel good about our work, we remain irrelevant for countless thousands of people in our community. One cynic defined a philosopher as a blind man in a dark room, looking for a black cat that isn't there and a theologian as the man or woman who finds it.

We recognise the great gulf that exists between the religious and cultural world of the New Testament and ourselves. However, we take the challenge of the scriptures and seek to engage with both the community and the gospel. Let us remind ourselves of our gospel reading and our text.

Text: Mark 3:14-15

“He appointed twelve - designating them apostles - that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.”

In referring to the appointing of the Twelve, David Hewitt, in his Crossway Bible Guide, gives the popular title, “Jesus chooses his first team”. This is helpful because there clearly was a wider group.

- An initial phase of Jesus' ministry has begun and now a new initiative is underway
- Jesus, like many others that would follow, turns from the religious establishment of the day to take his message into the open air
- This was not strategic withdrawal, but waiting for the appropriate time for the ultimate conflict.

In so many areas of life proper timing is essential, but nowhere more so than in the launching of Jesus' mission and later in his coming face to face with the events and people that would lead to the cross.

Several things strike me about the twelve –

- They were ordinary by nature - not a priest or scribe or Pharisee among them
- They were a mixed bag - impetuous, ambitious, conservative, radical and even melancholy



- Yet, despite their differences in temperament, background and personality, it was the team Jesus chose.

As we stand at the beginning of this new year, we are part of the team that Jesus wants ... and what is more, our very variety is God's gift to us.

The humility of our servanthood is measured against Jesus Christ. Phillips Brooks, who helpfully wrote about our ministry and witness, says "The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is."

Our ministry and service as a Church is always to be measured against the One who called us - Jesus Christ. By that measure, we will find ourselves making sense of the message and mission we share together.

For those of us stepping out in ministry, in new ministry or challenge, we may wonder just how it is that God can use us – but, in the mystery of God's call, we discover his grace. If today we are to engage in the challenge of Christian ministry, there are things we should remind ourselves of:-

The communion with God you are to maintain

If we are to be effective, we will keep in touch with God.

- Worship, prayer and study are vital for us
- Our sense of working together under God and supporting each other
- Jesus called the disciples to be companions and representatives.

The life of the Church must be marked by many things, but over and above all must be a sense of the presence of God. We need to give priority not only to our buildings being places of worship, but also to our congregations that enable all to feel included.

The development of mid-week work continues. Some run Sunday School on Wednesdays - and mid-week work with adults. The challenge of the city centre requires a creative use of Sunday.

- As ministers, we must make space for God
- We talk to Him, as well as about Him
- Discovering pathways of service with Christ at the centre.

Pressures will endanger our communion –

- we need time to develop our life with God
- staff meetings need to reflect the place of devotion.

I once had a large team and our staff fellowship became so crowded – so I decided that once a month we would share prayer and devotion and business was banned. There was sufficient space for that at other times.



I might be understood as being over-zealous about this, but it is in the very conflicts that we face in understanding the gospel, in the struggle for justice and in the way of service that we must draw on our spiritual resources.

Richard Foster, Evangelical Quaker, is best known for Celebration of Discipline but in his book Prayer - finding the heart's true home, he writes about the need for a cultivated spiritual life. He reflects upon Archbishop Antony Bloom, whose father used to put a note on his door when at prayer - "Don't go to the trouble of knocking. I am at home, but I will not open the door." Foster says he has never felt able to do that, but he has on occasion put on his office door a sign everyone understands - "In Conference with the Boss!"

We must not be embarrassed about giving spiritual priorities to our individual and corporate lives. We are in need of proper priorities - and this must be one.

The commission from God you are to fulfil

There is a sense in which we can understand this in an especially relevant way this evening - we are together committing ourselves afresh in service of Jesus Christ.

- The disciples were thrust out - more than just sent
- There was urgency about taking the message to others
- This urgency needs to be balanced with time for people.

It is now fifty-two years since Bob Dylan struck the note and words "The times they are a-changing". The ideas at the time seemed alien to some, but none of us could deny it today!

As we stand at this point in the history of the church and our world:-

- Culture is in transition - 'quite unprecedented social and cultural shifts are taking place' - David Lyon
- It is an age of rootlessness - 'people have rejected the past as a source of inspiration or example'. This causes despair to some church folk, but it is a mark of the age in which we live
- There is uncertainty about values - at a time when it seems to be impossible to find any consensus, we have to be prepared to give a lead and point the way. The X Files used to say, "The truth is out there" There are many who are not even sure if there is any truth left!

We are a people who are called to build a community of faith in the midst of our communities. Those communities are not just questioning themselves, but are being questioned by others on every side.

In the 1960s and 70s, many sociologists were suggesting that institutions were breaking down. This was not all bad because some seemed to wield inappropriate power. The breakdown has accelerated at an alarming rate –

- It has an obvious impact upon the church
- It is true for organisations in general
- People's interest in issues that affect our community are in decline. The age of the sound bite and the obsession with relevance.



We must remind ourselves of our calling ... in the same way that the first Wesleyan Revival managed to consistently hold together social and personal holiness, we need to engage with the conflicting issues of our society. To be true to the handed-down wisdom of our Methodist tradition - we will hold firmly to vital and life-changing religious experience side by side with a vigorous and unrelenting social struggle for justice. For example, the issues that Jubilee 2000 raised have not gone away because it is now 2016! The challenge is to keep those issues before people, when they are no longer news items.

Vulnerability is one aspect of ministry we cannot avoid. We put ourselves at risk in the work of the gospel.

A Roman Catholic writer, Tony Castle, tells the story of a priest who was summoned in haste by a woman taken ill suddenly. He answered the call though somewhat puzzled, for he knew that she was not of his parish, and was moreover, known to be a devoted worker in another parish. While he was waiting to be shown to the sickroom he began talking to the little girl of the house.

"It is very gratifying to know that your mother thought of me in her illness," he said. "Is your own priest away?" "Oh, no," answered the child in a matter of fact tone, "he's home. Only we thought it might be something contagious - and we didn't want to take any risks!"

- Beyond the humour, we must be vulnerable
- Be concerned to look out for others
- Put ourselves on the line for Jesus Christ.

The compassion of God you are to show

As a people, we are bound together in a united allegiance, a common mission, but it is best expressed in the shared vision of compassion and spirituality.

- We are remembered by our inspiring sermons (and our uninspiring ones!)
- We are recalled by our ability to order the life of the church (and our failure to do so)
- But we are most authentic in our ministry when we 'do the work as well as words of God'.

In contrast to the rejection by the religious leaders, Jesus is welcomed by the ordinary people of the Galilee. The Galileans were northerners and with much of the same connotation that we place upon that term today in so many cultures! One of the good things about our itinerant ministry is the wide experience it gives to the Church - both to its ministry and its congregations.

I used to remind our people that far from complaining that we are in the North of England and that they don't understand us in the House of Commons in Westminster, we as a church can say we are at our best when we live close to the people who hurt, are poor and who suffer. The gospel in our experience has full reign when communities have suffered - so Christian communities are at one with them.

A special place for the hurt –



In the ministry of Jesus, this was most certainly true. Fifteen years ago, Carol and I were on the island of Eleuthera and I preached for eight nights in churches with no windows, intermittent electricity and nearly every hymnbook and Bible was damaged. A hurricane had devastated the island beyond imagining –

- Yet it was a vibrant church
- There was a practical response – building people’s homes first before the church
- Creating an open door into the community.

Hand and heart reaching out to the poor -

The mission of Jesus was bound up with the poor and the excluded. In the late 1980s I preached on the Moray Firth ... and there I discovered seven churches from Peterhead and Findochty to Buckie. The early history is that, though the impact of Methodism in Scotland was not widespread, it was influential here - because of the poverty of the fishermen. The church had a place for them.

Identity with Jesus in his sufferings -

This is when what we are saying becomes a gospel truth - for the cross is not just a symbol on a wall, on a lapel or on a chain around our neck - it is a profound truth in our lives. We share with Christ. Galatians 2:20.

As the breach between the religious leadership of his day and Jesus widened, he began to expand his mission and he went ‘up a mountain’ and called his people. After the resurrection, Jesus also climbed a mountain and sent his disciples out.

To respond to this, we shall need to be spiritually fresh. Every leader knows the problems of handling the perennial need to be spiritually alive –

- give God our attention
- meditate upon spiritual meanings
- worship God
- share with others
- read deep material.

Augustine’s oft-quoted words - “Work as if all depends upon us and pray as if all depends on God.”

As we begin the new year together, we remind ourselves that the whole community of Wesley Mission is reaffirming its priorities –

- ‘Our common senses of calling’ will enable us to do that
- As a whole mission, we ‘have a new beginning’
- Don’t be too concerned about the change of personnel ... but hold onto each other wherever possible. Ministers, chaplains and pastors – we need each other ... always support each other.

Ministers and leaders always appear to get better - and we are almost perfect when we have been left five years!



Eddie Gibbs, writer on church growth, tells the story of the ultimate chain letter, which first appeared in an Anglican Church newsletter -

If you are unhappy with your vicar, simply have your church wardens send a copy of this letter to six other churches who are tired of their vicar. Then bundle up your vicar and send him to the church at the top of the list in this letter.

Within a week you will receive 16,435 vicars and one of them should be all right. Have faith in this chain letter for vicars. Do not break the chain. One church did and got their old vicar back!

Serious points are being made –

- Let's work with what we have
- Eagerly seek to serve the Lord.

As those who are engaged in ministry, pastoral care and chaplaincy, we are committed to a high calling and we affirm that ministry in each other and offer our gratitude to God for the privilege of working together in his service.