

Diocese of Grahamstown

Synods: 4-6 May

‘God’s Mission – God’s vision’

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Whose mission? What mission? Why mission? Theological Considerations

It has become very fashionable today to read on the wall at the reception of corporate organisations, companies, NGO’s, even our churches the “mission” statement and sometimes with what is called a “vision”. A typical statement would read something like: “this company seeks to serve all people without favour or fear....”

The fact that many organisations have “mission” statements suggests that the idea and concept behind the term mission is critical to the operation of any organisation. No organisation can operate without an idea of mission – since mission is about vision, accomplishing a vision.

We, all of us here are Christians precisely because of the mission of the Church of England, that started when Bishop Gray landed at the Cape in the late 19th century. The institutions and infrastructures that the missionaries laid, such as: Armstrong in Grahamstown or Callaway in Natal and Mthatha, Archdeacon Button in Clydesdale have made the Anglican a great Church in the land.

However, in recent times classical “mission” has had a bad press, precisely because of its association with the oppressive colonial agenda and apartheid. From a global perspective, since 1950s mission has run into crisis, hence questions have arisen: What is mission? Whose mission? Why mission? More immediately in post 1994 SA, the churches face even more urgent questions: Now that structural apartheid is gone: what is the mission of the Church? It is almost as if the church has lost its direction.

What is mission?

There is no word in the Scripture that literary translates “mission” (Martin Lee, Five marks of Mission). The word mission derives from the Latin *Missum* denoting sent. It is not merely sending without a purpose. It is sending....being sent with a specific purpose/task (Lee). “Pempo,” more commonly translated as “sent” seems to have not much purpose attached to it

(Lee). In this respect, mission therefore is associated with being sent with a particular, specified purpose (Lee). In this respect, mission can best be understood from the perspective of agency.

Agency in Mission

The issue of *agency* is not only urgent but also critical in mission; - the agent, the sender. Mission is contingent upon the sender...the sender and the sent. In other words, the subject and the object of mission have critical implications in the manner in which mission takes place.

Mission: catching the vision of God.

[And sustaining God's vision]

In the New Testament, a word that denotes the idea of mission is encapsulated in the word "sending". The first one, *apostello* is used "to send forth" as in Apostle, "one sent forth." More profoundly, the idea of sending as in mission is perhaps best denoted in Isaiah's episode of the vision. (ch.6): "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord lifted high, angels singing, Holy, Holy, Holy "Who will go for us?" "Send me, Lord", so Isaiah responded. The episode of Isaiah encountering the Lord in his vision is critical precisely because there Isaiah captured the glimpse of the Holiness of God. It was from the perspective of Holiness that Isaiah accepted the calling. He captured God's vision, which in fact was God's mission.

Bosch says, "God is a missionary God..." Mission is not primarily an activity of the Church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. (Bosch 400). Mission is thereby seen as movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is the church because there is mission, not vice versa. It is God who sends and equips us, his Church; equipped so as to collaborate with God in Mission. It is about dreaming with God, moving with God.

Mission goes out from God". Mission is God's way of loving and saving the world." So mission is never our invention or our choice." The initiative in mission is God's and not ours." We are called merely to be part of God's mission as we follow Jesus who said, "as the Father has sent me, so I send you." "It is not the church of God that has a mission, but the God of mission who has a church" (Martin Lee). It is about embracing the vision of God and moving with it.

Archbishop William Temple once expressed this, "Expect great things from God and do great things for God." Just as Isaiah captured the essence of mission so did William Temple. Mission is about catching the 'glimpse of the vision of God', moving with God. It is about partnering with God and collaborating with God.

Over the years, I have always found the missionary motto of the Standard Bank of South Africa as apt in capturing some dimensions God's mission. In marketing itself the Bank projects itself as highly "Inspired, and totally Motivated and totally Involved" with its clients. I think this motto is relevant to the manner in which mission can be understood.

Unless we are inspired, unless we are moved by the vision of God, mission is impossible. The missionaries came to Africa precisely because they caught the vision of God. John Wesley is said to have said: "the world is my parish." So mission starts in dreaming with God – Fundamentally it is about God's vision seeking to –restore, to renew His image in the created order and humanity. In this we are called to be God's-co-workers.

According to Bosch, there are two dimensions to this process of restoration; the negative as well as the positive aspect to it. As Bosch says, the negative dimension entails that mission means saying "no" to the world, no to the forces in the world that undermine God's vision for the restoration of God's image in humanity and environment. Mission is God's "no" to the world where people experience social injustice, no to drugs, no to economic and social exploitation, no to promiscuity, no to corruption, no to greed; no to poverty; no to the exploitation of the poor; no to racism, no to ethnicity, no to xenophobia. In this respect, mission entails turning our backs against the world. You are in the world, but not of the world, said our Lord.

David Bosch also says mission is saying "yes" to the world. Being inspired by the vision of God, we are called to collaborate with God in the process of restoration of the God's image in humanity and environment; taking God into confidence and collaborating with God. It is about being on the side of God; being on the side of His people, his world, his creation... To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love (Bosch 400). David Bosch also affirms that mission entails ...yes to gender equity, yes to the sexually other; in other words affirming the dignity of all who are marginalised.

Hence, mission takes place where people are **motivated** by the Spirit of God. How can we be motivated unless we are inspired by the word of God? So cultivating a disciplined prayer life, contemplation and meditation is the anchor of mission. A disciplined prayer life is the resources that must inspire us, motivate us to move with God. We can only remain motivated when we continually stay in the counsel of God, motivated by His sense of calling; when we stay connected through regular celebration of the Eucharist; nourished with God's heavenly food. Therefore this entails:

Mission as *journeying with the Other!*

Mission entails involvement and engagement: being **involved** rather than being uninvolved with the people. In their missionary motto, in trying to get clients, ABSA Bank projects itself as totally involved in the life of the people: “Together, Today, Tomorrow”, meaning “we will always be together.”

Mission is about accompaniment, journeying alongside with the people of God on the way to experience the fullness of life in Jesus. This evokes the image of pilgrimage. The Israelites moving from Egypt to Canaan were a people on the move with God; a missionary people; accompanied by God. We are called to assure the people of God that we are on the move with God; we are with them, that we move with them, step by step. When impression is given that we need people in our pews precisely because of their financial contributions to the running of the church; we miss the mark of mission – as people feel that they are merely used. Our people need love, they need to be loved. This brings me to another critical point in mission. Mission as:

Shepherding

Mission entails shepherding, in fact, pastoring. We are called to be the shepherds and watchmen of his flock. A shepherd walks alongside her/his sheep, in front of her/his sheep, and behind his/her sheep, cares and pastors. She/he watches over the sheep. A Shepherd must stand by the door of the kraal to see that all sheep have left kraal; to see that all sheep have entered the kraal.

So we are to be alert in the society. Not only to be alert but also diligent. Being on the guard: What is happening in the world, in my nation? my town? my village? And how will that affect my flock, the manner in which I do ministry? How will issues of government service delivery affect members of my congregation? What role can I play in engaging government structures to enhance the equality of the people? How about land issues? How do these affect my flock? What role must I play to engage the authorities to resolve conflicts, if any arises? So the mission of God entails total involvement with the people of God. Alongside shepherding, we are called to the ministry of servanthood, the ministry of service:

Servanthood

Mission entails servanthood. Mission is impossible except approached in the spirit of obedience and humility – “not by might, but by my Spirit”, says, the Lord. We are called to servanthood; to live and experience servanthood. Yes, pastors, priests, and ministers we are precisely - but

primarily because first and foremost we are called to the ministry of diakonos – serving in the Spirit of Christ; sometimes one sees how disrespected is the office of a deacon in the church; the pillar of our missionary calling and service. One of the beauties in the old liturgical garment was the sub-deacon and a celebrating priest wearing a maniple at the Eucharist celebration, that neglected garment that reminded one form of a servant. So mission is about doing service – “for Christ lowered himself even in a form of a servant...” (Philippians 2:6-7)

So in fact mission entails “washing of the Feet,” – serving the people of God. Jesus said to his disciples: “You see the Gentiles Lord it over the...let it not so among you...” We are not called to the ministry of status and power; rather to the ministry that draws us to the cross of Christ and His resurrection; it is about Good Friday and Easter. We are called to suffer with our people and bid them to gaze on the risen and glorified Christ. We are called to proclaim social justice where injustice is done; it is the ministry of solidarity with the victims of sexual abuse, the socially exploited people; the weak. “God wants me to be a messenger of his love” (Rick Warren, *The purpose Driven Church*, p. 81). However, the church’s missionary dimension evokes intentional, that is direct involvement in society; it actually moves beyond the walls of the church and engages in missionary “points of concentration.” (Bosch, 382)....

I believe the great Missional Statement that we proclaim every Sunday at the Eucharistic Liturgy: “Father Almighty, we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable... send us into the world to live and work.”

Christ bids us to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice in the world – so that we can offer hope where no hope exists; to bring light where darkness abides. Sacrifice entails obedience and a certain detachment from self. Detachment from self which must lead to attachment to the Holy Other!

1. Service and ministry/diakonia:

Mission is impossible unless it is conducted in the spirit of the ministry of the ‘washing of the feet.’ “You call me Lord, yes, you are right. If I as Lord have done this, go you do the same to the least of these”. Servanthood and service belong together. Servanthood and service characterise out calling to the priesthood. People will never take seriously what we say; what we preach rather will take seriously what we do. Mahatma Ghandi once said to a Christian, “Jesus is ideal and wonderful, but you Christians are not like him!” The people of God, the *laos* look to a priest and lay leadership to provide a ministry that will feed them. Jesus said, “Peter, do you love me? Feed my sheep; do you love me, tend my sheep; do you love me, feed my

sheep. (John 21:17). The ministry of service requires that we model our life on Jesus as Shepherd. To what extent are we in the ministry of the presence, visiting people in hospital and in homes? We are called to be pastors, priests and ministers; not bosses, not masters. Once the priesthood is associated with status and privilege it loses its legitimacy to be a serving office.

We are called to be shepherds after the chief shepherd. Shepherding is about listening to the voice of God and listening to the voice of the flock of Christ... in obedience and in humility. People expect clergy to lead in society... to what extent are we involved in the ministry of advocacy in the city?

The people we serve expect quality spiritual heavenly services: Sisters and brothers, we are in business, in business for the Lord; if our spiritual services are deficient, people will vote with their feet and go elsewhere, Pentecostals and will close doors. Is Mass celebrated with dignity and solemnity? Are the sick cared for, how about the lonely and frail? Do we take time to be with them? Finally, the mission of God is about sharing with Christ the burden of his discipleship; the yoke of Christ.

The Cost of Discipleship: Our contemporary context

Mission is a privilege of carrying the yoke of Christ, which is the Gospel of joy and sorrow; of salvation and death. We are called to profess and proclaim Jesus as Lord over the small lords of this world. Mission is impossible unless our character takes the form of a suffering servant, Jesus Christ. Unless the seed dies ...it shall not we are called to martyrria; through word and deed to bear testimony to the scars of Christ in our on lives...

South African Society Today: Creation, restoration and Healing

Post-1994 context has brought in unique challenges that the Church and the Anglican Church face. It is a very complex context that calls for church's creative engagement. The context is burdened by some social evils: rampant corruption, non-service delivery, women and child abuse, drug abuse, more recently racism and xenophobia and afro-phobia.

In this context what stands at the centre of mission is the dire need for restoration; the urgent need for a renewed humanity. There is a sense of urgency for healing and reconciling in the life of many broken by apartheid, wounded by apartheid. We have the mandate of bringing about healing and reconciliation in the humanity broken by abuse, exploitation; poverty and inequities.

Social services whether in the form of schools or hospitals or clinics are not on the margins but rather are the cutting edge of the Gospel. They belong to God's vision of seeking to restore humankind in the image of God. They belong to his mission of renewing humankind. Where we have these resources; God calls us to good stewardship to manage them for the benefit of the community. The Psalmist says: "The earth is the Lords, and all that He created." Creation, restoration, and salvation are interlinked. All of them relate to the dynamism of God who is continually giving himself to the world; God who through Christ selflessly renews humanity and the created order.

So after all mission is about stewardship, being good and trusted wardens of what we have already: land, infrastructures. God calls us, you and I – with God to renew image his created order; Getting involved in social welfare projects; transforming the social and political life of God... It is the mission of God when we help our communities to cultivate gardens; to raise chickens for food; to cultivate land that lies fallow...It is part of our call in renewing the image of God in humanity and the created order.

Reconciliation and healing constitute the core of mission. After years of brutalisation of apartheid, people and land needs healing and renewal. It is reconciliation that must occur on different levels of society. The country continues to bleed with the wounds of apartheid and colonialism as racist tendencies resurfaces. In this context, Christ calls all people of God to dream with him, to collaborate with him as he works for a reconciled, renewed humanity and creation. God in Christ reconciled humanity.

Conclusion:

Being **Inspired** by His Vision

Being **Motivated** by His Activity in the world

Being **Involved** in His Plans