

Along the track

Joining God in the Neighbourhood 2

If we think about Jesus' great missionary command, we probably think of "Go out and make disciples of all nations, baptising them etc" as we read in Matthew. That's one but not the first. The one before that is probably more relevant to today:

Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Tiberias Sea (the Sea of Galilee). This is how he did it. Peter announced, "I'm going fishing."

The rest of them replied, "We're going with you." They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night. When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn't recognize him.

Jesus spoke to them: "Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?"

They answered, "No."

He said, "Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens."

They did what he said. All of a sudden there were so many fish in it, they weren't strong enough to pull it in.

John 21:1-6

Two big clues there. They did not recognise Jesus! They were sick of a long fruitless night doing the same thing over and over. It was a pretty terse 'no' to his question. So what's Jesus' advice? Throw your nets out on the other side. Stop doing the same thing over and over. Do something different!!!

Are we open to Jesus' advice – throw out your nets on the other side? Look somewhere else to find what God is doing in the massively changing world that we live in today. What is God up to in our neighbourhoods and communities? How can we go out and join with what God is doing in these places. What are the hopes and joys of our community, what is the glue that holds them together or what divides them? What is concerning them? We can get so caught up in church questions that we cannot even recognise Jesus and where we are being called.

This isn't a new situation. Christians have faced enormous challenges over two thousand years. The first Christians had to let go of old ways, old understandings and struggle with new questions, new understandings if they were to follow The Way. The times of the reformation created enormous upheaval, new understandings and different ways of living The Way. The Enlightenment rocked the foundation of Christianity and how we understood God's place in our

world. It is as if every few generations we have to make Jesus and ourselves born again. We are called again to have confidence in Jesus' advice to throw off the net to the other side.

So there are two important starting points. The church is not finished, it is not over, it is not as if it does not have anything to say in the world we live in. It is true that many are no longer listening, so why? Why have they turned off? Who are they listening to? On the other hand, the world is not a bad place, it too has 'something to say'. God is at work in the world and God is at work in the church. We have to learn to listen to each other, to engage with each other, to learn each other's language, as it were.

Paul did that in Athens. For the first weeks he listened to what they were talking about, to their songs, their poetry, to the discussions in the market place. And then he began to engage with the people after he had found where God was at work in that place. Like Paul, we have to learn again what mission means in our time, place and culture. We don't yet know.

To welcome people at Mass on Sunday do we just hand them out the bulletin? And that's it? Roxburgh suggests that we ought to learn to walk through our neighbourhood with a notebook reflecting on simple questions such as: Without asking anyone, can I list the first and last names of the people who live beside, in front of, or behind me? What can I describe about their lives that can only be known by someone who has been inside their home? What are some of the God-shaping longings and/or questions that currently shape their lives?

Whoa, hang on!!! Am I expected to do and know that!!!! So how else will we know God at work? Could we take the same notebook and look at the volunteer service organisations that work for people in your town or suburb. Not the church ones, the other ones. Why are they doing that? What motivates them? What are they hoping to achieve? What do you think is the greatest social need in your suburb or community or town, who is in need of healing, freedom and love?

Regards

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