



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
3 Stanmore Bay Road,
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.
www.ststephenswgp.org.nz

Sermon

Growing in Faith, Love and Mission

Acts 7:55-60; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

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Growing in faith, love and mission

A few years ago, as a parish we worked on developing a Mission statement. Sue Smith took Vestry through a series of questions which gave us many ideas of what were here for. You as a congregation voted on those to highlight what was important and suggested other ideas we may have missed. We checked on the meaning and implications of various words to see if we understood the same thing by them. And finally, a statement was produced.

Last weekend, we held an overnight retreat for the new Vestry to help us get established as a team and to do some thinking together. It was a valuable time away and then on Sunday evening some 24 of us saw the excellent film, "The Case for Christ". If you haven't seen it – we recommend it. I am re-reading the book at present.

Anyway, on the retreat something shocking happened! I was asked if we had a mission statement! I was shocked; I was dismayed; I was horrified! Yes – we have a mission statement. I have talked about it; it is on the KITsheet every week, it is often on the screen

The human brain has a great ability to filter out unnecessary information so we can focus on what is important. You want your skin to report important information like a pin-prick, a touch or a burn but you want to be able to ignore the brush of every piece of fabric against your skin as you walk, sit or even lie still. I have a friend who suffered a brain injury in a heart operation which has made it difficult for him to do that. Faint sounds overwhelm him, loud sounds drive him to distraction. Too much visual stimulation wears him out – all because that ability to filter out the unnecessary input has been impaired.

Obviously, the mission statement is filtered out as not news (true) and not even seen by some of us. So they asked me to preach on it.

What is it by the way? **Growing in faith, love and mission.** Glad you knew that :-)

I relate faith, love and mission to the principles that we should have three focal points. These are up, in and out.

We need as individuals and as a Christian community to focus **up** to God. There needs to be a relationship with God and attention given to him. We need to be growing in **faith**.

We need to be relating to each other **in** community. For us as Christians, that means growing in **love**.

We need to be reaching **out** to others – we need to be growing in **mission**.

Up, in and out: Growing in faith, love and mission.

Today we have three passages set by the Lectionary which do not seem to have much to do with each other or the church season. The readings in Peter's epistle continue as we are taken through that letter. The gospel moves from resurrection accounts to part of Jesus' discussion with the disciples at the Last Supper. The other reading (mysteriously to me) takes us to the stoning of Stephen which is chronologically several years on and all the more confusing since we haven't finished talking about the ascension and Pentecost which are soon coming events in the historical account.

Whatever the mysteries of the Lectionary compilers' thinking, each of the texts can speak to us as a fellowship of believers. Each passage has a mysterious link to this parish and what God has already shown us. Amazingly, the three passages relate to our mission statement. Hold onto your seats – let's go!

Acts 7:55-60

This parish has as its patron saint, Stephen, the first martyr for Jesus. He was an amazing disciple. Luke tells us several times in his account that Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit; his story should inspire us. We need the Holy Spirit to be able to follow Jesus as he calls us to do. We weren't meant to do it in our own strength – that is the route to frustration, failure and despair.

Stephen was a preacher and an apologist – he could argue the case for Christ (the film is showing at daytime sessions this week through to Wednesday if you haven't seen it). Stephen was so good at presenting the gospel they brought him to trial on false charges – he mounted as sterling defense which incited the wrath of the council of leaders against him. Verse 54 reads, "[The Sanhedrin] were furious and gnashed their teeth at him." But Stephen is granted a vision into heaven and sees the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Connection: You know the stained glass window at the rear of the chapel is an abstract representation of that blazing glory as he said, "Behold I see the heavens open."

What did that vision mean? Surely everyone there was well aware that a few years before Jesus had been on trial before them and been condemned for saying, "You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Stephen's vision confirmed Jesus' claim.

Through all our earthly lives, we need to keep growing in our faith. Faith can be defined as trust and obedience. It is not simply faith, but faith in God. We trust God and we obey God. We may not yet trust him as much as we wish. We need to grow in that. Faith is like a muscle: it grows through exercise and exertion. It is never comfortable to exercise faith, it always stretching us and takes us into a place where we are not in control, because we have to trust someone else – God.

We together need to be **growing in faith**.

1 Peter 2:2-10

As we turn to Peter's letter to the churches, our passage starts with him saying,

"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."¹

Grow up in your salvation! Newborn babies crave food and how they grow in those early days!

Do you crave spiritual food. We should hunger and thirst for instruction in the way of the Lord and to receive nourishment from the Bible. Babies who don't suck the milk fail to thrive, sicken and die.

Where is the **connection** in this passage to the parish? I was struck by the reference to the stone rejected by the builders has become the capstone. That is the text we put on the dedication plaque when we restored

¹ 2 Peter 2:2-3

the chapel. It was nearly discarded but then in 2008, Vestry under Paul's leadership and with consultancy from Don Battley made the decision to keep it. Our architect had the brief to design the new building around the old building and so it was retained and honoured. This year we will celebrate the chapel's 100th birthday.

By the way, we will also celebrate Wyn's 100th birthday too this year. Her day is on Wednesday 7th June and we will have a celebration morning tea between the services on Sunday 4th – in three weeks time.

Peter goes on to write about Christians being built into a spiritual building as living stones. That is our being bonded together into a whole. Stones in a wall are shaped and mortared in place. He says we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

This is corporate language. This is the IN of the Up, In, Out. In terms of our Mission statement it is the local corporate relationship. This is about **growing in love**.

Peter will enlarge on it through the rest of the letter. Of course there is some faith 'Up' aspect to what he is writing but that is because you can't do the relationship in the church without the relationship with God. Peter says, because we have believed in Jesus and not rejected him as so many do, we are included in that chosen priestly nation of God. We have received mercy, we have been included into the people of God.

Lastly, we turn to John 14.

John 14:1-14

These are poignant words for us as a fellowship at present since they are often used at funerals. We farewelled Doreen Oborn on Friday a woman of faith and prayer at age 105. My Father's house has many rooms – "I go to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."² All that we know is true of Doreen. We give thanks for her faith and a good end.

Up, In, Out: I want to claim this passage for mission, for outreach – the out focus. It too, has a considerable aspect of the faith connection with God but its thrust is towards mission. The great statement, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is the way to the Father, the source of true truth and life lived abundantly for eternity. That is the message of the gospel and here and elsewhere the gospel does not back away from presenting Jesus as the one source of life and truth, as the one way to the Father.

What Jesus has been saying is not his own words, a kind of interpretation of the truth. No, it is the truth itself, Jesus can say 'I am the truth' because "The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work."³

This is a bold claim and an exclusive claim. No comes to the Father but by me. As Tim said last week: no one else has deal with the sin problem – that is unique. If that statement is true, it must impel us to mission. People need to know that Jesus is the only way to the Father. It matters for your neighbours, your family and friends. It matters for New Zealanders and for Asians and Africans. This is the passage that speaks to us of mission, of outreach.

Connection: The resonance between the parish and this text for me is the word we received from God in 2012. I have told you before but it is worth repeating. We had completed the building and I was saying we had to look outwards. We had a Top Priority prayer meeting here in the new Church.

We asked God the question together, what do you want us to do? I was thinking in terms of programmes and forms of outreach. We waited quietly on God and then shared impressions. I had had the clear thought, "You already know." I had responded, "Lord, I accept your saying I already know, but I don't know what it is that I know."

² John 14:3

³ Verse 10

Lynelle Mann had heard, "Sail to the horizon." And Jon Henderson had the thought, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

It suddenly struck me that there was a parallel between the conversation in John 14 and ours. Jesus had said he was going to prepare a place for them and would return. "You know the way to the place I am going." Thomas had said they did not where Jesus was going or the way there. Jesus responded, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me."

In our prayer, I asked the way; I heard that I knew already. I said that I didn't recognise what I knew and Jon hears, "'I am the way and the truth and the life."

We understood that it was not a case of running programmes but of following Jesus in his way. That would include sailing to the horizon - the limit of visibility. In other words, go as far as you can see and then you will see more.

As we have done that, we have been led into starting Everyman, enlarging the Op Shops, starting 3DC, and all of our adventures and relationship with Kondo Diocese.

We need to be **growing in Mission**.

Support for Missions

I would like to encourage you about our growth in overseas mission support. In 2008, we bravely committed to support Kailakuri Hospital for three years to the tune of \$2000 p.a. Amazingly, that amount was met each year with little need to draw it to your attention. We even gave that last year, when it was not our main focus.

We were introduced to Bishop Given and a relationship formed. We have helped support his stipend, given money for church roofs and paid the rent for evangelists.

So far this year, we have sent off our contribution of \$5,000 to his stipend. We have sent \$4,000 to buy food for those in need in the tough conditions they face due to the rains coming late.

We have done that without needing to ask you for anything – you had steadily given it through the last year and when we came to the time to send it, there it was ready.

There is a commitment to support evangelists which I do need to remind you of. Some of you have steadily contributed through the year; two people have approached me and asked if it is time to give again – that is wonderful and I thank you for having it on your hearts.

In the past we have committed to support 6 evangelists, last year you gave enough for 10.

At present, we have \$2,169 available to send over. If we collect a further 231 we will have supported 10 again this year.

I think it is remarkable the way we have grown in mission involvement since 2012 that prayer meeting in 2012. It was at the end of 2012 that Given visited and look what the Lord has led us to be able to do. I would never have imagined going on any trip to Africa let alone the sort of village teaching we have done.

So as we move on, we need to pray that we continue to grow in faith, love and mission.