

MISSION #6, 07/11/21**TO STRIVE TO SAFEGUARD THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION AND SUSTAIN AND RENEW THE LIFE OF THE EARTH – RICHARD SAINT****PSALM 104, PSALM 24:1-2, GENESIS 2:15**

1. What particularly struck you or stood out for you from the talk
2. Psalm 104 is a wonderful and vivid recognition of God as creator and sustainer of all creation. The psalmist picks out their favourite parts of creation and uses them to praise God.
 - a. What are your favourite parts of creation? In the same manner as the psalmist we can use these things to recognise the awesome creativity of God.
3. The 5th mark of mission opens with the phrase, “Strive to Safeguard the integrity of creation”?
 - a. What comes to mind when you think of “the integrity of creation”?
4. How does our treatment of creation recognise the opening words of Psalm 24? “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it”
 - a. How does it not?
5. The first reason given by Richard for caring for creation was, “God has made us guardians of it” based on the Hebrew word for “to keep” as used in Genesis 2:15 as this word also portrays the intricacies of “to guard, to preserve, to treasure”.
 - a. Does the recognition of our role in creation as guardians change how we understand our relationship with creation?
6. The second reason given by Richard for caring for creation was, “we should love and value all people” and the Bible depicts the relationship between humans and the earth as an interdependent one – humans depend on the earth and the earth depend on humans. When this relationship is neglected, the earth fails to support humans.
 - a. Richard described this as an injustice and failing to demonstrate love and value to all people – why do you think this might be?
7. Richard proposed that these two reasons show us the missional nature of the 5th mark of mission as it shows the character and nature of God to the world.
 - a. Do you agree that safeguarding creation can be missional? What might this look like?

MISSION #5, 31/10/21**TO SEEK TO TRANSFORM UNJUST STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY, TO CHALLENGE VIOLENCE OF EVERY KIND AND TO PURSUE PEACE AND RECONCILIATION – KEITH BRINDLE****ISAIAH 58:1-14**

(When 'unjust structures' are mentioned below, it is shorthand and also includes violence of every kind, as well as places and situations where peace and reconciliation are needed.)

*Adapted (nicked!) from Tim Kellor.

Like responding to human need by loving service (the 3rd Mark of Mission, 24/10/21), seeking to transform unjust structures of society (the 4th Mark of Mission), is a key theme that can be traced through both the Old and New Testaments, demonstrated both by God and those he calls to follow him.

1. 1. What unjust structures in the world are you aware of?
 - a. Consider those that are local (personally know to you), national and international
 - b. Who are the winners? Who are the losers?
2. What unjust structures do we as individuals, and as a national, benefit from?
 - a. Is this acceptable? Consider if we (as individuals, and as a nation), were the ones being oppressed by the unjust structures.
3. In the OT landowners were not to harvest out to the edges of their field, maximizing profits for themselves, and then later out of their great wealth, help the poor only through philanthropy. Rather, landowners had to leave some of the produce in the field so that both their hired workers and the poor could come "glean" and get food through their own labour (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22). Deuteronomy 24:19 says the gleanings "shall be for the immigrant, the fatherless, and the widow." The Hebrew term rendered "be for" means ownership. God says that some of the profit from your business does not belong to you, but to those with less.*
 - a. Who are the modern-day equivalents of the "the immigrant, the fatherless, and the widow"? Does this list overlap with answers to 1.b.
 - b. What does/could the modern-day equivalents of "gleaning" look like (for those recipients in your answer to 3.a.)?
4. Key to the idea of biblical justice is universal equality, with all being created in the image of God. Biblical justice requires that every person be treated according to the same standards and with the same respect, regardless of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or any other social category. Leviticus 19:15 says: "You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour." Deuteronomy 16:19 says: "You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous." This biblical idea was unique and revolutionary in world history. Surrounding cultures and societies knew nothing of it. The idea that every human had equal dignity and worth was equally foreign to the Greeks and Romans. Aristotle famously said that some races and nationalities deserved to be slaves. The historian Tom Holland writes that ancient cultures, apart from Israel, completely lacked "any sense that the poor or the weak might have the slightest intrinsic value." What the Greeks, Romans, and other ancient cultures lacked was the book of Genesis, which teaches that all human beings were "equally... created

in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27). The Bible assumes it everywhere: "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God" (Proverbs 14:31). "Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all" (Proverbs 22:2).*

- a. Who are those that society/we do not deem as equal?
 - b. Who do we (unconsciously) show partiality (favouritism) to?
 - c. Do 'some races and nationalities deserve to be slaves'? And yet slavery, in a modern guise, remains, and those caught up in it come from particular/poorer nations. Discuss why this may be?
 - d. In a fragmented world, with so many cultures, classes, groups, factions, and identities, how can the universal equality of the 'image of God' in each and every person address our unjust structures without offending others?
 - e. In a few weeks it will be Remembrance Sunday. How do we 'remember well' on that day whilst also holding with integrity the idea that all are created in the image of God?(Please email your thoughts on this one back to Keith at vicar@stjamesdevizes.org as he is preaching on Remembrance Sunday and would value your input.)
5. What one unjust structure of society are you most passionate about?
- a. Why?
 - b. What would it look like for justice(peace and reconciliation)to exist in this situation?
 - c. What can you/we do to address this injustice?
 - d. Could you commit to giving a30mins a week to praying more, learning more, understanding more, discussing more, and acting more in response to this unjust structure?...and being open to where God leads you!?!)

MISSION #4, 24/10/21**TO RESPOND TO HUMAN NEED BY LOVING SERVICE – MIKE WILMOTT****MATTHEW 25:34-40**

Responding to human need by loving service is a key theme that can be traced through both the Old and New Testaments, demonstrated both by God and those he calls to follow him. After most questions, some passages from the Old or New Testaments are given in italics for further thought, but don't try and look all of them up one session, and these are only given as examples – you may between you in a connect group identify plenty of other answers!

1. The Apostle John writes: 'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19).
 - a. Can you think of examples of God responding to human need by loving service in the Old Testament?

Exodus 16:1-18; 17:1-7 – God providing food and water in the desert after the crossing of the Red Sea.

1 Kings 17:8-16 – Elijah and the widow of Zarephath

2. Are there examples of individuals in the Old Testament responding to human need by loving service?

Abraham praying for the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah Genesis 18:22-32

Daniel saving the lives of the wise men – Daniel 2

Esther saving her people – Esther Chapter 4

3. In what different ways did Jesus respond to human need by such service?
 - a. What do you think was his motivation?

Compassion/love

Matthew 20:32-34 – healing

Mark 6:34-44 – feeding them, meeting both their physical and spiritual needs

Putting love into action, glorifying his Father

4. Whilst some of the actions Jesus took were truly miraculous, can you think of some that were not?
 - a. Do these give us any insight into how we, as followers of Jesus, could respond to human need?

John Chapter 4 – talking to the woman at the well

Luke 19:1-10 – Inviting himself to Zacchaeus's house

Luke 7:36-40 = Defending the sinful woman at Simon the Pharisee's house.

We could welcome the outsider; seek justice for those unfairly accused; offer hospitality

Matthew 25 v 34 -40 – feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, visit the prisoner.

5. Read Galatians 5:6 Paul states that 'the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love'.
 - a. Are you surprised that Paul didn't finish his sentence after the word 'faith'?
 - b. What do you think Paul is getting at when talking about 'faith expressed through love'?

- c. Can you think of any examples in the stories we have about Paul where he puts this into practice?

Collecting money from the gentile churches to support the poor in Jerusalem (probably Jews) eg Romans 15:25 -27

Healing the Roman Official's father on Malta and others – Acts 28 -7-10

6. How important are building relationships in responding to human need?
 - a. Is responding to human need a one-way street from donor to recipient or can we learn more about how God's Kingdom works by investing in relationships?
Paul's letter to Philemon shows a two-way relationship – Philemon has received a blessing from Paul who in turn asks for him to show grace to his former slave
7. Do you think serving others through loving service is cost free?
8. Responding to human need can be done both individually and with others through the church.
 - a. Can you see this mark of mission expressed in the life of our church at St James?

MISSION #3, 10/10/21**TEACH, BAPTISE, AND NURTURE BELIEVERS – RICHARD SAINT****1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-9**

1. What comes to mind when you think about the word “nurturing”?
2. Can you identify someone who has nurtured you in your life and faith?
 - a. What was it that they particularly did?
3. What are your thoughts on the progression of Belong, Believe, Behave?
 - a. Belong – known and loved by God, you belong
 - b. Believe – question, investigate, explore faith
 - c. Behave – faith begins to transform your daily life
4. How might we nurture people at each of these three stages?
5. Richard compared nurturing faith to nurturing a plant. You need to know what that person needs:
 - a. To know what they are struggling with,
 - b. To know what challenges they are facing,
 - c. To provide the support they need
 - d. To offer guidance, encouragement, challenge...
 - e. As we think about being missional gardeners, who has God put in your missional garden?
 - What would/does it look like to nurture this person?
6. Proverbs 17:17 says, “A friend loves at all times, and family are born to share adversity”
 - a. How might this verse help us to understand what it is to be nurturing?

Personal Reflection

7. There is not a point in this life when our faith is perfected, we are always in need of nurturing.
 - a. God is the one who has ultimate responsibility for the establishment and growth of our faith.
 - b. What are you in need of today? Bring it to God in prayer.

MISSION #2, 03/10/21**PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS – KEITH BRINDLE****ACTS 8:26-40 (Luke 4:16-21, Matt 10:5-8,)**

1. At the start of his ministry Jesus read from the Book of Isaiah in the synagogue of his home town (Luke 4:16-21).
 - a. Think of (list even) the ways, in word and action, St James, the other churches in our neighbourhood, the denominations and the Christian organisations in this country and around the world, have proclaimed the good news as outlined in the Isaiah reading quoted by Jesus. Give thanks for these different ministries, the people involved, and the good that is done.
 - b. Think of (list even) the ways in which Christians have hindered such proclamation, and have instead added to the woes of the poor, blind, oppressed, etc. How do we respond to such a list of wrongs in a Christ-like way? (This is the important and painful work that many Christians denominations and organisations are currently undertaking as they address their past abuses of power.)

When Jesus sent out the 12 disciples, he gave them instructions (Matt 10:5-8), which end with, 'Freely you have received; now freely give?'

2. What was your initial response to what Keith said about needing to receive before we could (or had anything to) give?
3. What are the possible consequences of 'giving' if we have not received (for a long time) from God? (Consider how this relates to Q1.b.)
4. If it relates to you, what gets in the way of you receiving from God? What in the past has got in the way?
5. What, today, do you most need to receive from God? (It may be best to consider this in silence)
6. What have you received that is your gift to others? (Often this is an experience, understanding, or relationship that is uniquely yours, but is beneficial to others).
 - a. Are you able to talk about God's provision as part of what you have experienced?
7. What have you received from other Christians that was given to them? Give thanks for them and what they shared.
8. How do we give what is needed, rather than give inappropriately, or give what we think is needed? (Again consider how this relates to Q1.b.)(Philip unpacked scripture for the Eunuch, which is what he needed, rather than give a puncture repair kit for the Eunuch's chariot, which he didn't.)
9. How are you making yourself more open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in your everyday life?
10. Finally (if you have got this far!), looking at the example of Jesus (and bear in mind Q1.b.), what 5 rules do you think Christians should abide by when proclaiming the Good News of Jesus (please email them to vicar@stjamesdevizes.org)

MISSION #1, 26/09/21**WHAT IS MISSION? – RICHARD SAINT****MATTHEW 22:36-40 & 28:16-20**

1. What were your initial responses to the questions about mission?
 - a. Who, What, Where
 - b. What do you think has formed these views?
2. What discourages you about mission?
3. What do you think of the following statements?
 - a. Mission is primarily carried out by paid leaders
 - b. I need to travel somewhere else to do mission
 - c. I can't do mission as I am not good at speaking
 - d. Conversion is the only fruitful result of mission
4. What do you think of all followers having a role in joining with God's mission?
5. Can you identify how and where God might have been using you in the past for his mission?
6. Which of the 5 marks of mission stand out to you?
 - a. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
 - b. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
 - c. To respond to human need by loving service
 - d. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
 - e. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth
7. What skills, gifts, personality traits might God be calling you to use?
 - a. Often, other people are better at noticing these in us than we are ourselves.
8. Where do you think God might be calling you?
 - a. Remember, it might be exactly where you are right now...
9. Maybe end with the prayer we used in church:

Father, give me eyes and heart to see where you would have me serve you,
The desire and courage to ask what you would have me do,
And the love and grace to do it
For your joy and glory may it be
Amen