

Beyond the Walls

I realise there are many types of walls. Mention has been made of theological, racial, social walls etc. I have chosen to focus on the task of mission – to the community beyond our church walls.

1. Why go beyond the walls?

It would be easier not!

All this emphasis on mission is demanding.

Why can't we just be us?

Possible reasons

1. If we don't, the church will die
 - a. The church won't. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."
 - b. My church might. Are we more concerned about "my church"?
2. We are struggling to pay the bills, or keep our minister. We need more money.
3. We feel driven by guilt.
 - a. We go to all these conferences and forums and we are repeatedly told it is all about mission
4. We feel better helping others

Why?

Is there something we can look to in the scriptures?

Great Commandments (Mt 22:37-39)

- Love God
- Love others
 - We are not commanded to love ourselves!
 - Loving ourselves is assumed. We do that. We are commanded to turn our attention and our compassion towards others.

Great Commission

We are a sent church

- Matthew: Go and make disciples of all nations
- Mark: Go into all the world...
- Luke: repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.
- John: As the Father has sent me, I am sending you...
- Acts: my witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria and to end of earth

The reason for going beyond the walls is that we are a sent church.

The reason that we are a sent church is that God is a God of mission

God loves the world

God loves every person on the earth

God cares about each lost sheep

Fundamentally, we are called to forget about ourselves and to be concerned for others. The church is sent to those outside its walls. The people outside are more of a priority than those inside.

Quotes

Archbishop William Temple:

"The church is the only organisation in the world that exists primarily for the benefit of its non-members."

Rob Bell (p. 165 in Velvet Elvis):

"The church doesn't exist for itself; it exists to serve the world. It is not ultimately about the church; it's about all the people God wants to bless through the church. When the church loses sight of this, it loses its heart."

Brian McLaren: (A New Kind of Christian, p. 157.)

"The church doesn't exist to satisfy the consumer demands of believers; the church exists to equip and mobilize men and women for God's mission in the world."

David Bosch: (Transforming Mission, p.390)

There is a church because there is mission, not vice versa

- Mission derived from "mitio" = send
- Mk 3:14: ¹⁴ He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons.

What would that mean?

- Focus is the community
- Reflected in budget
- Passion and compassion for the unsaved
- Our members would be sharing the gospel and making sacrifices to do so
- Willingness to sacrifice our own preferences in order to reach out to others

Are we?

- In many instances that is not true of our church
 - Quote: There is not a culture of conversion in the Presbyterian Church
 - It is not only about evangelism. I'll come to that later. But it is about evangelism

So what do we do?

- We have been made very conscious of the need to serve; to meet needs
 - All manner of ways of serving the community
 - Individuals
 - In workplace
 - In family
 - By joining community groups
 - By being involved in "causes"
 - Or, hospitality
 - Equals inviting people into our homes/walls
 - Might require releasing people from church work
 - Corporately
 - Foodbanks
 - Medical centres
 - Family events – at Calvin, Gore
 - Farmarama
 - Children's Day

- Mid-winter beach party
- Baby-sitting service
- Funerals
- Firewood – possibly more important in Gore than elsewhere
- Serving is crucial to who we are as a church
 - Jesus modelled it
 - Healing
 - Raising from the dead
 - Befriending
 - Casting out demons
 - Comforting, encouraging
- BUT
 - I don't believe that serving is enough
 - Serving is not an end in itself
 - I get asked, "We do all these things in the community but what makes us any different from social workers?"
 - Churches are saying – We do all this work but to what end? Why don't we just leave it for the service club down the road?
 - Salvation Army
 - Huge respect in the community for their social work
 - They have to advertise on TV reminding people that they are a church
 - (They say of themselves) Serving has become an end in itself
 - And serving is not enough
 - Have set 4 goals
 - To grow all Salvationists as dynamic disciples
 - To increase the number of new soldiers
 - To take significant steps towards the eradication of poverty in New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga
 - To be a connected, streamlined and mission-focused Army.
 - Telling people in every ministry that they must embody all 4 goals e.g. bridge programme
 - Salvation Army = epitome of Christian service
 - And they are saying "It is not enough"
 - In Dunedin, experimenting with a one-stop-shop approach
 - Many services on the one site
 - Including the church
 - They want the serving to not be divorced from the task of making disciples
 - That divorce kills the church
- Serving has huge value
 - Alleviates need and suffering
 - Treats people with dignity and respect
 - It demonstrates love and compassion
 - It shows the church to be relevant (whereas otherwise, many would easily forget the church)

- It shows the church's willingness to give without asking – to reflect God's grace
- But, for Jesus, serving wasn't the end of the story
 - There was the question: Will you follow me? Will you trust me? Will you believe in me?
 - The serving opened up those questions
 - If you were blind and healed by Jesus, it immediately raises lots of questions:
 - Who is this man?
 - Why did He do that for me?
 - How should I respond to Him?
 - It would be impossible to stop at simply the serving
 - The serving inevitably led to other questions
- **Let's look again at our commissioning**
- Mt: make disciples, baptising them and teaching them to obey
- Mk: *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*
- Lk: repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.
- Jn: ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."
- There seems to be a pretty clear emphasis.
- It is about preaching the gospel and making followers of Jesus with a strong emphasis on the forgiveness of sins.
 - That is our commission
 - Serving is a vital part of it, but only part
- Example: Mainly Music – typical to hear people say, "We don't see anyone come to church."
 - Does that matter? Is getting people to church the objective?
 - Yes and No
 - Yes, because we are to make disciples
 - Wrong to be content to serve people without wanting them to come to know Jesus
 - We don't love them if we don't want them to be forgiven and saved
 - No, church attendance might not be the best measure of disciples being made
 - What if they were meeting regularly with someone who was mentoring them as parents, including the importance of faith in Jesus? Maybe it could lead to a fresh expression of church.
 - But I questions whether MM itself is church
 - What are the irreducible characteristics of a Christian church?
 - Worshipping community?
 - Missional community?

- Are people studying the scriptures and growing in their faith?
- If we have 100 or 150 people coming to Mainly Music, should we call it “successful”?
- I believe we need to “add value” to serving
 - Serving is crucial but it is not the whole deal
 - Suggest process
 - Establish relationships
 - Demonstrate the Kingdom of God
 - Share the good news of Jesus
 - Seek a response
 - Grow the new Christian through the various stages to maturity
 - Commission him/her to also make disciples
 - Explain process
 - Establish a relationship
 - Example: Rose – Saturday servants – said that their intention was simply to build relationships.
 - That is where it started but, in practice, that is not where it stopped.
 - Genuine relationships
 - Do we have an agenda?
 - Yes. We do want people to find the better life in Jesus
 - But not utilitarian relationships
 - We want to be friends whether or not they become Christians
 - First step = establish a relationship
 - Demonstrate the Kingdom of God
 - Example: Rose
 - Two aspects:
 - Simply serving – asking nothing – demonstration of grace.
 - Can have profound effect
 - Raises all sorts of questions for people
 - Why do you do this?
 - Praying for the house sales and seeing God answer those prayers
 - People experience God (not only God’s people)
 - Experience the power of God as well as the love of God
 - Sometimes these two can happen in the other order.
 - The demonstration of the Kingdom may be what initiates the relationship
 - Establishing a relationship maybe something that takes years or it might happen in seconds
 - Share the good news of Jesus
 - Example: Rose – one of those families became involved in the life of the church where they heard about Jesus
 - I do not means simply a message of eternal salvation

- The gospel is that
 - But whatever a person's need (friendship, value, healing...) salvation is found in Jesus
 - We ought not to have a one-size-fits-all gospel presentation – a pat answer
 - E.g. Four Spiritual Laws
 - It requires a bit more of us
 - That we are sensitive to what the need is
 - That we know Jesus well enough ourselves to know what about Jesus is relevant to this need.
 - Seek a response
 - We are often a bit coy about that
 - I don't think it is right to pressure people
 - But it is wrong to not give them the opportunity to experience the full life that Jesus offers.
 - Example: Rose – one of those families had come to faith and was to be baptised(?)
 - Subsequent steps of making disciples of those who come to faith
 - But we won't go into them now
- If that is the process, it suggests we need stepping stones for people
 - If they are coming to mainly music,
 - The serving is a demonstration of the Kingdom of God
 - Build relationships – get to know them
 - Invite them to something else – move them on a little bit
 - That is appropriate and attractive and not too big a step?
 - Some other service e.g. marriage course
 - Somewhere they can hear the gospel e.g. Alpha
 - Give them information about other things happening in the church
 - Pray for a need
 - Needs the whole church to be coordinated
 - Needs creativity in creating those steps
 - It means we are always looking to move people on
- If they do respond to the gospel, nurture them in their faith
- Words, deeds and signs
 - Have tended to separate; need all
 - Process
 - Deeds = befriending and serving
 - Signs = demonstrating the power of God
 - Words = sharing the gospel
 - Words = truth of God; deeds = love of God; signs = power of God
 - We would want all three
 - Present in Jesus' ministry
 - We won't be equally comfortable with all three
 - Some churches (or theological strands) have been strong in one area but not the others
 - But maybe need to stretch ourselves

- Recognise and appreciate other parts of the body
- All of that happens beyond the walls
- Words – Evangelism – is that the area in which we struggle the most?
 - Leaders’ congress
 - We have lost confidence in the gospel! We are not sure it will work anymore; that Jesus shows up and transforms lives.
 - We simply have to re-discover a passion for the gospel
 - We have to care that people don’t know Jesus and don’t know the blessings
 - Christchurch – for some there is hopelessness, lack of peace.
 - People have died without knowing Jesus

- **Worship**

- Shop window – where people can see the church
- How do we make it visitor-focused
 - Desire to see people relax in first few minutes
 - Explain the strange practices – it is culturally a different world
 - Reduce that cultural difference
 - Be friendly!
 - Style should be that that suits the visitor
 - Yet we want it the way we want it

- **Come and see**

- I said worship was the shop window – the place where people can see Christianity in action
- Sad if that is the only place they can see Christianity in action
- John 1 – come and see
 - Come and see what happens
 - No commitment, just observe
 - What did the disciples see? (OR John the Baptist’s disciples: Are you the One? Tell John... Mt 11:2-6)
 - Consider that as a means of evangelism
 - What would we show them?
 - Are we living lives where people would see God at work?
 - Maybe
 - Invite someone regularly for a meal
 - Congress stories: Never been in a context where the meal was the context for constant arguing
 - Never seen a family function well
 - We need to open our lives to people
 - That tests our willingness
 - Are we really here primarily for others or for ourselves?

Those not yet in the church are a higher priority than those who are
Is that what we see?

Dying to self

We have difficulty with that

- Survey: (Win Arn?) 89% of Christians said the church existed to meet their needs and those of their family!
- Murray Robertson quotes a survey that showed that most Christians want to belong to a church that is slowly dying
 - Explain
 - That is shocking! Most Christians say, in effect, “I don’t care about others as long as I am OK.”
- We live in a world where it is all about me.
 - Self-image, self-actualisation, self-respect, self-fulfilment, self-interest, self-sufficiency, being self-made
 - Why should you buy L’Oreal products? Because you are worth it.
- For each of these statements, who is it about?
 - I didn’t get much out of worship today
 - I don’t want my church to grow because then I won’t know everybody
 - The church exists to me my needs and my family’s needs (USA survey showed 89% of Christians believe that.)
 - I am going to go to another church. This one doesn’t suit me.
 - Having a new member in our small group would change the dynamics. It has taken a long time for us to get to this point.
 - I don’t want people to see that I am struggling or that our family is struggling.
 - I think we should have longer periods of singing so that we can get fully engrossed in worship.
 - Can we take down these things in this other church? We don’t like them.
 - Yes, great idea to unite our churches! We’ll worship at my church.
- We are naturally self-centred
 - When handed a photo of a group we were in...
- In practice, are we...
 - More concerned for those outside the church than those in it?
 - Evangelising?
- Jesus calls us to die to ourselves.
 - Luke 9:23: If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me
 - Anyone – mandatory
 - Deny himself – say “No” to ourselves – desires, appetites
 - Sometimes legitimate desires e.g. fasting
 - To put Jesus first
 - I don’t matter
 - Take up cross
 - Walk to your death
 - Not carry a heavy load
 - About dying – daily
 - Follow Him
 - Surrender independence
 - 3 images that all say “It is not about you”

If we are not primarily for those outside it is a question of basic spiritual immaturity

- Maybe we are weak beyond the walls because we haven’t made disciples
 - People who are mature in Christ
 - That is something that we do with the people *inside* the walls

So, there is a balance here

We need to develop churches that are healthy in what they do in the community AND healthy internally.

This can be the cause of tension

People question the resources put into areas that they consider less important

We do need to review where our resources go

But it is not all one-sided

If our fellowship is weak, people won't be loved and supported

We need to build community

People crave community and being loved

If our discipling is weak, we won't have people who know how to die to themselves

Or know how to serve, or use their spiritual gifts

If our worship is weak, people won't be connected to God

How can we minister effectively in the community, if we aren't connecting with God?

Ending

The target is the community; the unsaved

Everything should be focused towards that

Serving is not an end in itself. We have a greater desire for people than just that.

But, we need to be healthy in all aspects of the church to effectively reach the community

Questions

1. What is the evidence that the people of your church believe that the church exists not for them but for those who are not yet members?
2. What is the most important first step required to help your church look outwards?