

## Mission Community

### 1. A missional community is a alien community

- This week I shared an article on Facebook about the Safe Schools programme
  - The SSP sets itself up as a programme aimed at addressing bullying of students with who identify as LGBTI
- The article I shared whilst
  - totally supportive of anti-bullying
  - accepting there are others who hold different worldviews to himself
- Said
  - there are many things about the programme that are inappropriate; and
  - the programme goes beyond being an anti-bullying programme to imposing its particular worldview of sexuality on students that not everyone agrees with
- The article was not anti-LGBTI ... but just saying it was not appropriate goes too far in what it imposes
  
- The comments I got on Facebook were from non-Christians dis-liking the article and wanting to remonstrate with me
- That's okay
  - I don't expect everyone to agree with me
  
- Now I mention this because it's an example of how the culture we live in today is largely anti-religion, and in particular, anti-Christian
- When Christians put their hand up and
  - talk about what they believe
  - propose a different worldview to the prevailing culture
  - then it is inevitably shot down and often in quite a hostile way
  
- There's lots of reasons for this ... but the culture we live in is not what it was 30, 40, 50 years ago in the West
- Over the past few decades ... Christianity has moved from the centre of culture ... to the margins
  - We now live in a Post-Christian world
  - Christendom ... the idea that Christianity is a normal part of the political and cultural worldview of a society ... has long gone
  
- Examples of this ... in the past
  - Normal for kids to go off to Sunday School normal > not so now

- Church on Sunday normal > now beach, sport and family time normal
  - Christian leaders respected and consulted (Billy Graham) > now despised or mocked (Jensen and Pell)
  - Scripture in schools used to be massive > now completely pushed out in Vic, under pressure in NSW, Ethics introduced as an alternative, numbers declining
  - Christian values were largely considered societies values > now Christian values are antiquated, fundamentalist, prudish
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- Christianity ... has been pushed to the margins of our culture
  - This is not a gripe ... just stating what the reality is
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- What this means is that if you're a Christian in Sydney or anywhere in the West ... it means in reality you're like a missionary in a foreign land
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- What this means is Christians can't assume people know or want to know the truth about Christianity
    - Most people don't believe in the gospel or want to take religion seriously
    - Most people don't know what the Bible has to say nor are they interested
  - The Western world is a mission field and Christian's are aliens and strangers in it
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- This is something the early church was having to deal with
    - And it is something the Apostle Peter recognised when he was writing his letter to the Christian church in that time
      - *1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, **strangers in the world**, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,*
      - *1 Peter 1:17<sup>17</sup> Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, **live your lives as strangers here** in reverent fear.*
      - *1 Peter 2:11<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, **I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world**, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul*
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- Peter knew what it's like to live on the margins of the culture of the day
  - What Peter had to say to Christians of his day ... is helpful for Christians today

- What he points out in v4-10 is that Christians are rejected by their culture because they are aligned with Jesus who himself is rejected by the culture
  - *1 Peter 2:4-5* <sup>4</sup> *As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--* <sup>5</sup> *you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*
- Here Peter is saying, Jesus is the cornerstone of a spiritual house that is being built
  - The people of God are being built into a new temple ... and Christ is the foundations stone
  - And those who are in Christ are being lined up and laid upon that Him as the foundation
  - And because Christ is rejected by the culture ... so all who are aligned with and built upon Christ are also rejected
- The word translated '*strangers*' in 1:17 and 2:11 literally means without a house / without a home / without a family
  - Christians are un-family in their culture
- It is opposite of the word that Peter uses in 2:5 to talk about the spiritual house that believers are being built into
- In Peter's time, Roman Society was viewed as a family with Cesar as the patriarch
  - But for Peter's readers, their new birth in Christ meant they moved outside of Caesar's 'family' > they'd become outsiders, homeless and un-family
  - But they're being built into a spiritual house and a new family
- And because the Christian has a new identity in Christ ... it enables them to live on the margins and live as a missionary in a foreign land
- So while the Christian is a missionary in their society ... living at the margins of their culture ...
  - They're not alone ... they're part of a mission community
  - They're being built into a new home - born again into a new family with Christ as their foundation stone and head
- **Application**
- Christians can respond to fact that they are on the margins of the culture with either hostility or with passivity
  - If we're passive we maintain a low profile we keep quiet about our faith and we conform to social patterns as much as possible

- That is the equivalent of hiding in a ghetto or reshaping Christianity into something more socially acceptable
- Or you can be hostile to the culture and want to fight back
  - And try and assert the Christian-ness of the nation and fight for Christian values to be normal within society
- Or a better way is to understand the culture and its worldview and seek to bring the good news of Jesus to bear in a way that others see that gospel brings hope, meaning, salvation and joy in a way that a life without Christ at the centre can never fulfill
- Given Christians are aliens and strangers in the world, then it means we can no longer assume that the church understands the culture
  - Like a missionary going into a foreign country, the missional community if believers needs to rediscover or relearn the culture
  - Christians need to get to know a neighborhood and its people their stories values and worldviews
  - We need to do this if we are to present Christ in a way that is meaningful and doesn't push us into passivity or hostility
- **Example**
- One of the values of today's culture is 'freedom'
  - A person ought to be 'free to do I want any old time' (to quote George Michael) > often it's freedom to express their sexuality
  - When we understand that cultural norm, then there is a point of connection with the gospel, because only in Christ can a person have real freedom without slavery
- While the missional community is an alien community, it none-the-less needs be involved in the community so it can know the culture we are seeing to be missionaries to

## 2. A missional community is a distinctive community

- Even though Christians are like aliens and strangers in a foreign land and on the margins of our culture ...
  - That doesn't mean the missional community is go into its shell and retreat from the culture
    - Monks in their monasteries
    - Amish isolated communities
  - The missional community is by definitional 'missional'

- Christians are to be like missionaries in their own land
- And 1 Peter helps show us what that looks like
- And a big theme of 1 Peter is that the missional community is a distinctive community
  - That is ... Christians and the Church are to set themselves apart in the way they live
- 1 Peter 1:14-16 Peter says
  - <sup>14</sup> *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.* <sup>15</sup> *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;* <sup>16</sup> *for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*
  - *1 Peter 2:1 rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.*
  - *1 Peter 2:11 <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.*
- The missional community is to be distinctive in the way that it lives
  - God's people are to be holy, abstain from sinful desire, and turn away from sinful behaviour
- Why?
  - *1 Peter 2:9 you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*
- When Peter says 1:14 'be holy because I am holy' he is quoting from Leviticus (OT)
  - Leviticus is full of rules and regulations but fundamentally it is about God creating a new people through his word that is to be distinctive in every way
  - They were to display the holiness of God in a way that attracts the nation's to find blessing as God promised Abraham
- Leviticus is intended to create a distinctive people by shaping every aspect of their lives - individually and corporately
  - It was not just about what people did in the temple ... it was about what they did in the market
- This holiness knows no bounds
  - It defines friendships, marriages, work, leisure, finances and politics
  - Holiness is as much about what you do on a Monday morning on the factory floor as it is about what you do on a Sunday morning in a church

- It's as much about the kind of neighbour you are as it is the kind of church member you are
- It is as much about who you are when you're holding a steering wheel as who you are when you're holding a Bible
  
- And like Israel Christians are chosen to be distinctive through obedience to God so that the world can see that God is good
- As Peter says in 2:12
  - *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*
  
- **Application**
- When our culture was largely Christian, mission was largely about doing events at church that tried to attract unbelievers to church
- But in a post-Christian context Christian mission can't rely on events ... however glitzy and cool they may be ... because the majority of people simply won't attend > they're not interested
- Being missional in a post-Christian world is not about events ... but a life and message that is unlike the culture
- What will draw people to hear the gospel is always going to be what is distinctive about church
- What will attract people to hear the gospel is the distinctiveness of a missional community who lives it out
  
- The context for gospel centered missional community is not about events, but ordinary everyday life
  - As A believer lives a life that is distinct from the culture and distinct from their neighbour ...
    - then others will see their good deeds,
    - they will see their life; and
    - it will give them reason to consider the claims of the gospel that they otherwise would ignore
  
- **Examples**
- Coach Craig
  - Craig is an active member at church who's boys love soccer. Craig realises the local soccer club is a great point of connection with the community so he volunteers to coach his sons team. As the season goes on, the other parents love the way Craig encourages all the boys at

training and games and the way he emphasises character and sportsmanship over winning at all costs. One day another Dad asks Craig about his coaching philosophy and he is able to share how his Christian faith teaches him to value people because they are made in the image of God, not because they are skillful or successful.

- Caring Cathy
  - Cathy is a mum with kids at the local school. Like most mums she hangs out at school in the afternoons waiting to pick up her children. Over time she gets to know a number of mums quite well. One day, her friend shares how life is pretty tough at the moment with her husband being away with work and one of the kids home sick. On the way home from school Cathy picks up a BBQ chicken and some burritos and drops it in to her friend's house for dinner. As she drops it off Cathy asks if she can pray her and her sick daughter.
- Mother Megan
  - Megan is a young mother with two young children. She decides to join a local mothers group in order to connect with other mums. Over the course of the year she gets to know other mums and has lots of conversations on spiritual, marriage, parenting, and personal issues. As time goes on, a few of the non-believing mums start to notice the humble and gentle nature of Megan and start asking questions about her church that she has spoken of in the past. Not long after several of them come along to the Christmas carols with their families
- Repentant Rick
  - Rick is asked by his work colleague Jack how his weekend was and Rick responds saying he was really challenged at church the topic of repentance and forgiveness with others, especially given how much he has been forgiven himself by God. He confides with Jack how he had spoken harshly to one of his staff last week in a team meeting and that he's been convicted to go and apologise to them and ask them for forgiveness. Jack is both stunned and impressed - he's never heard of a manager doing something like this before. He makes a note to catch up with Rick for lunch later in the week to find out how it went.
  
- As the missional community lives lives that are distinct from the culture ... then what it does is
  - it starts to give credibility to the message it proclaims
  - it gives unbelievers and reason to consider the gospel
  
- Toys and Tucker

- Serving the community out of love
- Amazing the number of people who say each year "It's great that you are doing this "
- Of course the opposite is true
  - When Christians aren't distinctive in the way they live their life ... unbelievers have no reason to consider the gospel
  - There's nothing attractive, nothing distinct ... so why would they?
- So the obvious question is ... to what extent are you living your life that is distinct from your non-Christian friends and family?
  - Do they know you are Christian?
  - Can they see you think and act differently to them?
  - Is it obvious that your identity in Christ, built on the foundation of the cornerstone Jesus is what's behind this?

### 3. A missional community is a culture blessing community

- But Peter doesn't just want the Christians he is writing to, to be different from their culture
  - He also wants them to be a culture blessing community
  - He wants their identity in Christ to be distinct when it needs to be ... but to embrace and bless the culture as strangers in a foreign land
- In 2:13-17 Peter shows them how
- Firstly they are to submit to those in authority over them
  - *"whether to the king, as the supreme authority, <sup>14</sup> or to governors"*
  - In other words they are to be good citizens
- And that doesn't just mean paying your taxes and keeping out of trouble
- It means
  - To be a good citizen is to contribute to the good of the city
  - To contribute positively to the culture
  - To be a blessing to the community
- We see this in
  - *1 Peter 2:12 <sup>12</sup> **Live such good lives** among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your **good deeds** and glorify God on the day he visits us.*
  - *1 Peter 2:15 <sup>15</sup> For it is God's will that by **doing good** you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.*



- The missional community is not meant to just hide itself away in a Christian ghetto
  - They are to help cultivate a culture that is good and a blessing to all who are part of it, whether they are Christian or not
  - And part of that includes doing good within the culture and contributing to it in a positive way
  
- One of the ways the missional community is a blessing to the culture is through its work
  - We're going to do a series on Faith and Work later in the year
  - But you doing your job and doing it well is actually a blessing to the community
  - Martin Luther - "The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes."
  
- But not just in doing your job well ... but in bringing a Christian perspective to the world through your work
  - The servant leadership you exhibit as you lead your team
  - The way your art reflects the goodness of creation
  - The ethics you insist on with your team and the decisions it makes
  - The values you teach students that go beyond the academic learning
  
- The missional community is also a blessing to the culture when it gets involved in
  - School P&C's, Canteens, Uniform shop
  - Volunteering at the local sports club
  - Advocating local govt members for improvements to the community
  - Championing the needs of the poor, refugee, homeless and marginalised
  
- Secondly v16 Peter says *"Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God."*
- I think what Peter is saying here is ...
  - Work what parts of the culture are good and use your freedom enjoy them, be part of it and contribute to it
  - But don't use the freedom you have in Christ to get involved in aspects of the culture that are unhelpful and ungodly
  - For Christians are first and foremost servants of God
  
- There will be some elements of the culture ... Christians would want to categorically reject

- Pornography, tyranny, idolatry
- Other aspects of the culture missional community can accept ... but with clear limits
  - Capitalism, movies, music, government
- Still other elements of culture where a believers faith in Jesus gives a new perspective and purpose for it
  - Family life, conflict resolution, empowerment, material possessions
- Then there will be other aspects of culture are created by the missional community
  - Homeless shelters, nursing homes, soup kitchens, orphanages, support for refugees
  
- What this means is the mission community is to live in such a way that says 'yes' and 'no' to the culture around it
  - There will be both affirmation and denial > or of being against the world and for the world,
  - The tension is crucial if the missional community is to remain faithful and at the same time retain her integrity and effectiveness in the world
  
- I find this really helpful
  - As I feel this growing marginalisation with the wider culture it is too easy to view it as a threat
  - It can be very easy for Christians to sit back and bag the culture and see themselves as better than the culture
  - To stand over the culture in a self-righteous way ... rather than see themselves as those who ought contribute to the culture in a positive way
  - Because if that's where we are at ... then it's not a good starting point for reaching people with the gospel
  - It dehumanises people and makes us hostile to those we should be trying to reach
- So the missional community must love its neighborhood and its culture

#### 4. Conclusion

- The missional community is not only God's means for encouraging and sustaining Christians living on the margins of the culture
  - The missional community is also God's missionary strategy
- We might imagine the greater impact could be had from the centre with the ear of the rich and famous and opportunities to exert influence on the beautiful and powerful

- But God calls on his missional community to bring him glory through being an everyday community of grace
- And so the missional community demonstrates the effectiveness of the gospel
  - A life transformed by grace as believers live lives that are holy and distinctive
  - A life that seeks to be a blessing to the community that is done by grace
- And as the missional community does that ... others will see that the gospel is
  - not an empty word but a powerful word
  - that takes men and women who are lovers of self
  - and transforms them by grace through the spirit into people who love God and love others
- When unbelievers see the gospel of grace in action ... it will give them reason to consider the life changing message of Jesus
  - Because what we want for all people ...
  - Is for them to know Christ crucified, so they are ready to meet Christ crowned

**PRAY**