

**Synod of the Diocese of Yukon
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OUTREACH IN THE CHURCH

By Reverend David Pritchard

“Go therefore” – the first two words of verse 19 of the 28th chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, the first two words of the ‘great commission’. We have three years of the accounts of Jesus ministry and his time with the twelve disciples – time that included much teaching and prayer and preparation for the time that he would not be with them. Little of that time was spent in the synagogues. Most of it was ‘out there’ affirming his own words in the great commission – to baptize and to teach. But it was more than that.

Look at the people he was with ‘out there’: widows, children orphans, the sick, the dying, the woman at the well, the blind, the deaf and the list goes on and on, but they all had one common characteristic – they were people in need – physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

I don’t know about any of you, but I know why I come to church. For fellowship, for music to sing praises to God, to hear his word spoken and preached, to receive His body and blood in the sacrament of Holy Communion, for prayer. And as much as that has value at the time of experiencing it, it also prepares, equips, energizes me to go out there, outside the doors of this cathedral, into God’s creation and do what St. Paul said to the Ephesians ‘ my brothers, be like Him’. Be, do, act, respond to the needs of His children wherever and whenever we find them.

I wonder about all this somewhat new attention to mission and outreach. These two words don’t even show up in scripture. And yet their meanings are embraced by the ministry of Jesus during his earthly life. Maybe he didn’t have to use them, his example was sufficient ‘be like me’.

The last thing I want to suggest is that we are not out there doing mission and outreach. Everyone one of us gathered here today can give examples of outreach activities that they do as individuals and corporately as parishes. But is it enough? Are there impediments that prevent us from doing more? Just look at the state of our church today – (example from national church, example from Council of the North, example from our own Diocese and an example from the parish level). At times we seem to be locked into maintenance or survival mode which detracts from our efforts to see beyond ourselves – out there where the needs are so great. And yet scripture is filled with hope and direction; In Numbers 22:16 it says ‘Let nothing, I pray, hinder you’; In Luke 1:37 in the story of the virgin birth, it says ‘for nothing will be impossible for God’ and similarly in Mark 10 in the story of the Rich Man Jesus said “with man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” ; and finally in 1 Cor. 13:2 it says ‘ and have not charity, I am nothing’.

I am sure there are other impediments that lead to our unwillingness to give more of our time, talent and money for God’s purposes. Where do we stand on the principle of the biblical tithe?

Do we only give until we are cutting into our own needs? Would it be the end of the world if I asked each one of us to cough up right now one hundred or two hundred dollars? Would it plunge us into financial bankruptcy? Not likely!

Let me give you an illustration of real outreach. Thembie Mashinini is the Swazi administrator of the Swaziland Educational Trust Society – (tell the story of the recent phone call). People with next to nothing helping people who have even less. SETS has become much more than just helping students get an education. With eyes and ears open new bonds of love and solidarity are being formed with and among families with a common need – they are all poor, they all want their children to get an education and as much as they appreciate what Canadians are doing for them they know that they need to do things for themselves.

One day you draw strength from someone else and the next day they draw strength from you. But when we are out there we need to have our ears and eyes open to the needs of people – we can't be like the priest and the Levite who simply passed by on the other side.

Let me conclude with a final story. In Jewish lore there is a story about a boy who was a fugitive from the Nazis. The boy fled to a small Jewish village and asked for refuge, and the villagers hid him. When the Nazis came looking for him, they announced to the village, "If you do not deliver the boy to us we will burn your village to the ground". The people went to their young rabbi and said, "What shall we do?" The young rabbi promised to get back to them after had studied the Scriptures. So he went into his study and prayed, and studied, and searched the tradition for an answer. He could not escape this biblical passage that said, "It is better for one person to die than that the whole people should be lost." So without talking anymore to the villagers, he simply turned over the young boy to the Nazis.

That night, the prophet Elijah appeared to him in a dream. Elijah said to the rabbi, "What have you done? How could you have done that?"

The rabbi said, "I turned the boy over because that's what the ancestors told us to do."

Elijah answered: "Don't you realize? That boy was the Messiah! You've turned over the Messiah to the enemy. And he will be killed."

The young rabbi was horrified. "But how could I have known?" he protested.

Elijah said to him: "If you had put down your books and gone to visit the fugitive just once, just once, and then looked into his eyes, you would have known."

What's the moral to the story? Simply, let's put down all those things that are keeping us from looking into the eyes of Christ this afternoon, and rise from this place to look deep into the eyes of the fugitives of the world. You show the depth of your understanding of God by the breadth of your undertaking for others.

Reverend David Pritchard