

SERMON

Acts 3:11-21

The Message and the Mission are Still the Same

Nunawading and Waverley, 18-4-21

Dear friends in Christ,

On the ABC programme, "The Drum", I caught the tail end of a conversation about religion in general. I think there was a Christian there but he wasn't doing a very good job of it. The presenter asked why Christianity is no longer relevant to people. In a situation like that, we needn't take a step back. Jesus Christ, who has saved us, who has left the grave cloths behind and opened up for us a pathway to the glory of the heavenly Father, is always real and who can turn our lives around. An attack or slur on Christianity is a great opportunity for us to broadcast the message of Christ and serve him in his mission, which is to bring redemption to many people. If the failures of the church cannot be avoided then I think it is best to say that this reveals the need for all people to be saved.

Today, people are not belongers. Even golf clubs struggle with declining memberships yet they have a good product. Organisations that once provided frameworks are going the way of the dodo such as unions, churches, rotary etc. Why is this? I think one of the reasons is the rampant individualism of our age. Many do not want to give of themselves or belong to others. Instead, the project of life is me, my fulfillment, my pleasure, and my life-style. I think that is why the life-style programmes on television are so popular and the boutique breweries, and the boutique anything are so attractive to people.

Someone said on "The Drum", "I have my spiritual beliefs but I am not into organised religion." Again, let's get on the front foot and ask if the person belongs to a family? A family is organised; just think of a party and the guests, the gifts, and the food that have to be organised. It is like saying, "I believe in family but I won't attend an organised holiday." Or, "I value education but won't attend school, university or vocational training, because they are institutions." The problem is this extreme individualism I have already mentioned. My purpose in making these remarks is to help you to not be brow-beaten by what you hear or what people say to you. The apostle Peter proclaimed without apology the failures of the crowd before him and the power in the name of Jesus.

In the latest McCrindle research, 69% of Australians believe in the soul, that is, another dimension to life beyond this natural existence. 18–26-year-olds, the youngest group in the survey, actually had the highest belief in the soul and life after death; just less than half of them. Only 14% do not believe in miracles. 31% believe in them and 29% were open to the possibility. What is this telling us? It is saying quite loudly that people are still religious beings and for the church it means that the message and mission are still the same.

The apostolic church began with acts of kindness, such as the healing of the paraplegic who was clinging to Peter and John, and all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them at Solomon's Porch. It built bridges of love and began to tackle the social inequalities, especially helping the poor, the widows and the orphans, slaves and the elderly. The old adage, find a need and fulfill it, is still true today. But these must be bridges of the gospel. It is no use helping a lot of people and not engaging with them in the message. Hence, Peter bounced straight from the healing to Jesus Christ. He wasted no time in coming to the centre of our faith, the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Peter began with sin and salvation. I think in our secular age it assumes too much because they assume a prior understanding of these concepts, which the Jewish audience would have had. Better to talk about the difference knowing the Lord makes in your life or simply build on what people are conversing about. On Thursday, someone was chatting with me about house prices but very quickly the conversation turned to Jesus' attitude to money and what he said about it, or rather, our love of money.

Finally, what is so clear in this early evangelist speech is that Peter held out the promise of grace: By faith in his name, this man whom you see and know, it is Jesus' name that made him strong and on the basis of faith in him, he gave to him this complete restoration in the presence of all of you. Notice how Peter was saying that Jesus healed the paraplegic and brought fullness of life to him. Jesus is not a figure of history because he is a living being, risen from the dead and active in people's lives today. Our mission and message are no different to Peter's, which is to say that it is relevant I think and actually works for us.