



Easter 7

THE NEW SHOFAR

Christ's disciples are the Temple of God in the world

Acts 10:44-48 - John 15:9-17

and in the same way I have sent you into the world...

These words are a part of the priestly prayer of Jesus, a prayer to his Father in which he sums up the core of his own ministry (faithful obedience to the will of the Father) and outlines to his disciples the nature of their own ministry. They are to continue the work begun by Jesus but continue it in a specific way, or style... *just as you have sent me into the world.* There are fewer places in the whole of the Bible where the will of God is spelt out more clearly. As Christ was in the world, so too his disciples are to be in the world. As Christ ministered in the world, so too are disciples to minister in the world. The words, the deeds and the manner of Jesus are all to be evident in the words, the deeds and the way of living of his disciples.

All the activity of the disciples is subject to the clear precept of their Lord. They are not left free to choose their own methods or adopt their own conception of their task. Their work is to be Christ-work, and therefore they are absolutely dependent on the will of Jesus. Happy are they whose duty is fixed by such a precept and who are therefore free from the tyranny of their own ideas and calculations... Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his great book...

The Cost of Discipleship:

The Missionary equation

In the First Letter of St John (5:9-13), the author sets down with absolute clarity the way God continues to carry out his saving works in the world. It is almost mathematical in the precision with which he writes:

God gave us eternal life

This life is in his Son.

Whoever lives in the Son has life;

Whoever does not live in the Son of God has no life.

This is why Christian preaching is called **the Good News of the Kingdom**. It is about what God has been doing and continues to do in the world. As his saving love was so fully and perfectly revealed in his Son Jesus the Christ, so too it continues to be revealed in and

through the same Son. Now, it is the Risen and Glorified Christ at work in the words and deeds of those who come to him and follow him as disciples. In our lives!

In the New Testament, St Paul sought to express this kind of unity as something existing between all disciples in Jesus Christ. We are, he said, **the Body of Christ** in the world. The union between believers and their fellow disciples is meant to be as close as the relationship is between the Father and the Son... *I pray... that they may be one as we are one.* In writing to the Romans (**chapter 6**) Paul reminded them of how it is *by our baptism into his death we were*

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buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power we too should begin living a new life...If we have died with Christ, we believe that we...are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

God works with those who love him, who are called to his purpose

Here, in a short verse from the Letter to the Romans, we have a neat little summary of where the world finds God at work today. God works in and through believers living in his Son, in those who follow the Messiah sent for the salvation of all. Paul goes on to say that such people have been *moulded to the pattern of his Son*. Again and again we come back to this same message: The mission of the Church in the world is the mission of Jesus in the world. The Church's priorities, its pastoral practices, its image, its activities, indeed everything it thinks, says and does must be conformed to all Jesus thought, said and did. This is difficult to do but it does set a clear benchmark for establishing "where we go from here". Our post-Pentecost programme is to be built around...*what would Jesus do in this situation...what would Jesus say to this person or to that event/thing/reality...if Jesus had to choose something in our parish, what direction would he take, what choices would he make? How would he judge our present priorities and our own pastoral practices, our liturgies and our mission?*

But how can the world call on someone if they do not know him?

This is the essential message of **Romans 10**. He asks powerful questions of the Church and of individual believers. If Christ is the only Way to Life Eternal, how are unbelievers in our communities to share in this life? It is through Christians becoming windows into the divine, into the kind of joys, peace and hope that comes from living in Christ Jesus. This is what the Bible calls *witnessing* to the living Christ.

But Paul goes on to ask – *but how are they to come to him if they have never heard of him?* Hearing about Jesus here means if they have no experience of the reality of Jesus Christ that stands behind the name. It means experiencing Jesus' saving love and mercy. Paul again – *and how will they hear of him unless there is a preacher for them?* Christ needs to be revealed to the world and that revelation rests on the shoulders of all believers. It is a huge responsibility, one so often skipped over or presumed to be the work of others.

But there is still more...*and how will there be preachers if none are sent?...*and he quotes the words of the prophet Isaiah...*how beautiful are the feet of the messenger of Good News*. We are the ones sent and the responsibility of bringing Christ to the world is ours. We are not alone for it is a collaborative ministry with the Son and the Holy Spirit. What we cannot do on our own the Spirit does in us, leading us to caught up in the love of *Abba, our Father in Heaven*.

To end again with Bonhoeffer: *The temple is the place where the gracious presence of God condescends to dwell among men and also the place where God receives his people. Both aspects of the temple are fulfilled only in the incarnation. Here is the real presence of God in bodily form, as well as the new humanity, for Christ has taken that humanity upon himself in his own body... God finds man in the Body of Christ and man finds himself accepted by God in that same body. The Body of Christ is the spiritual temple built out of living stones. The challenge is making that a reality for the rest of the world.*