

## Monmouth Diocesan Conference 2018

@MissionMonmouth

Context is everything.

Have you ever misunderstood a situation because you did not know the big picture? With the media today, damage and harm are done by quick quotes or sound bytes, which are taken out of context. Even verses from the Bible itself have been used for great acts of evil, when they were removed from their context.

There is also the danger of living a life that is out of context. You were not meant to float independently through this life as a short sound byte, out of sync and out of context with the greater story that God is telling in His word. The Bible has a theme to the narrative that we can navigate our lives by. We can align our lives with the context of God's story – if we know the theme.

What verses come to mind when you think of the word, "MISSION"?

Most of us are hard pressed to name more than the old faithful Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'*

For years, our church culture has singled out this passage to be the theme of our mission conferences and the motivation for those who attend. It is no wonder that our obedience is slow - who wants to hang their future on a couple of verses?

Mission is not something the Bible merely speaks about – mission is what the Bible is all about.

It is the context that provides the backbone for God's story and our story. Since creation, God has been interested in redeeming all peoples to Himself. Let's look at the Bible in light of God's heart for

the world, and we will see that from Genesis to the Revelation He is beckoning all everyone to join Him. The Bible is not a collection of separate books with no common theme or story. It is one book with an Introduction: Genesis 1-11, a Plot: Genesis 12 - Jude and a Conclusion: Revelation.

God begins in Genesis by commanding humanity to fill the earth. In Genesis 1:28,

*“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth...”*

God created Adam and Eve in His image and he wanted them to fill the earth with these image bearers and worshippers. God has always had a plan to fill the earth with a worldwide worshipping community.

God creates the nations. God sets aside one nation that will be his missionary nation.

*Genesis 12:1-3 “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you...I will bless you...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’”*

We find out later that the “blessing” is salvation through Abraham’s faith. But God has a larger context for what He is going to do for the world through Abraham and his family. God blesses Abraham so that in-turn, he and his family can be a blessing to all the people of the world. Interestingly, this command was not for Abraham alone. This responsibility was for everyone in Abraham’s family. They were a missionary family.

The rest of the Old Testament is a warts and all story of how God’s people did and didn’t behave as a missionary people. Sometimes they forgot they were special and looked to false gods. Sometimes they forgot they were missionary, like Ezra and Nehemiah and thought they were God’s only people. Sometimes cheeky books like Ruth and Jonah, reminded God’s people who they were – a missionary people, a missionary family.

As we understand the bigger context we can begin to see the stories of the Old Testament through a new mission lens.

BANG! THEN GOD ENTERS! No longer a missionary people, God incarnates God's missionary nature. God enters the world and says, 'Here I am; this is what I look like, this is my nature, this is what I do!'

Whether it is taking a longer route to reach a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42) or healing various Gentiles to teach His followers (Mark 5:1-20, 7:24-30), Jesus Christ in the New Testament embodies the missionary pattern established in the Old Testament.

The purpose of God in gathering worshippers from all peoples, helps us understand Jesus' teachings and actions such as Clearing the temple when upon *"reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area designated for the Gentiles to worship and found people buying and selling there. He drove them out, saying, "Is it not written; 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'?"* Mark 11:15-17.

Basically, they were shutting out the very Gentiles that God desired to gather and include in worship. As Jesus teaches on the sign of His return in Matthew 24:14, *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come,"* we can see that something about the timeline of God's purpose in history will hinge on the fulfilment of His Abrahamic promise to bless all nations, all peoples.

Jesus' ministry was to be driven by a need to make the kingdom of God known to the areas that had not yet heard the message of salvation. In Luke 4:42-43, Jesus gives this as the reason for leaving a city where there were still needs;

*"...they tried to keep him from leaving them, but He said, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.'"*

Jesus gives a clear Mandate to His followers in each Gospel account which Mark records as:

*“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation”  
(Mark 16:15).*

The book of Acts is a testimony of the account of the gospel spreading to the ends of the earth. It begins with Jesus echoing what He had taught the disciples for the past three years. Luke records in Acts 1:8,

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

The rest of the book of Acts and Epistles give a detailed description of Paul and the rest of the missionary band struggling to raise up churches all over the world. Paul carries the same governing principle that Jesus had, in emphasizing the need to reach the unreached. Paul gives us his ambition for his ministry in Romans 15:20 saying, *“I have made it my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ is not yet known.”*

The introduction: Genesis 1-11, the plot: Genesis 12 through to Jude. So, what is the conclusion? In Revelation 7:9 John records a scene that has great meaning in light of God’s promise to Abraham, the theme of the Old and New Testaments, the Commandments of Jesus as well as the unfinished narrative of Acts saying, *“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb...”*

It is important to connect what is happening in Revelation with what God started in Genesis 12 in the life of Abraham. God will do it. There will be a representative from every nation, tribe, people, and language bowing and worshipping at His feet. Heaven is diverse, inclusive and multicultural.

God is a missionary God, and from cover to cover in the Bible God is showing us this mission, the overarching narrative that drives all that God does.

From the words of the Book spring the action of the Church. We are God's fifth Gospel, our lives re-telling the story of Jesus Christ's activity in the world. Now that we see God's missionary activity in the Bible and the mission of the Church through the ages, we have no choice: Ours is a missionary God, we belong to a missionary Church, we are a missionary People.

Ours are the hands that hold and heal, the voices that cry out against poverty and injustice, the feet that walk the extra mile and the hearts that love, so that we are Good News, we are Gospel.

The question I want to know from you is, 'What is your missionary activity?' Through our information gathering via the Bishop's Audits and Mission Enquiry, we have discovered that mission is happening in large and small ways in all parts of the Diocese (though I think you don't always realize the missionary work you are already achieving). I'm going to read out a list of some of what I've gleaned. Please would you stand up, on hearing a project, you've been part of... or are planning for the future:

Support of the lonely or socially isolated

Homelessness

Alpha, Emmaus, Start or Pilgrim courses

The Ty Price Centre

Godly Play

The Living Room Café

Open the Book in schools

The Lab in Newport

JAM

Street Pastors

Litter Picking

Ministry in care and residential homes

Messy Church

Cake Saturday

Cake anytime!!

Work in our schools and colleges

Family Fun Days

Lunch Clubs

Chaplaincy to uniformed organisations  
Supporting people through bereavement and illness  
The Big Breakfast  
Community Outreach Days/activities  
Supporting the work of Food Banks throughout the diocese  
Dementia support groups  
Flicks in the Sticks  
Church Choirs and Music  
Coffee Mornings  
Supporting community projects and organisations  
Tea and Toast  
Advocacy for those trapped in poverty or deprivation  
Youth and Children's Work in so many varieties

Have you surprised yourself? Look at the room – you're all standing!!

Some mission is large and some small, but we need to rejoice in it and celebrate. I challenge you to all put Mission on every agenda of DCCs, PCCs and Ministry Area Councils and begin by asking what are we thankful for in mission? It's too easy for us to get bogged down with leaking roofs, low attendance and electricity bills and forget what we have to celebrate, to rejoice in, to be thankful for and to be hopeful about.

***Now I've talked a lot so a chance for you***

***5 minute buzz with neighbour sharing 1 thing to give thanks for in our churches.***

When we begin to celebrate that God is working in our churches and communities, we begin to see the opportunities and possibilities in Mission. Now, though, is the time to be intentional about our work. We used to run Activity Days for young people in our churches, but now we have Messy Church: Why? Not because we do much differently, but because we knew that what we were doing was making God present in our activities, but we were forgetting to make that explicit.

When we become a little brave, we discover that we have everything we need to grow the Kingdom, because we have God, we have each other and we have hope.

## **Film Clip**

So, we are all called to be missionaries, but this is often a frightening thought and people say to me:

**I'm too young** Jesus used the gifts of the young boy with 2 fish and 5 loaves to feed 5000 people. He entrusted his son to a teenage mother. Our children and young people can witness to the love of Christ in profound and vibrant ways, lets bless them and encourage them.

**I'm too old** How old was Moses when he began his ministry? 80 years old, and he managed to climb a mountain and lead his people to the promised land. With age is wisdom and experience.

When it comes to God age is not a limiting factor

**I can't get out much.** One of the most important mission projects I have ever encountered was in a sheltered housing complex. Every week 4 elderly ladies from different denominations met for coffee and then they prayed for each church and each mission or outreach project in the town, praying by name of each event and everyone involved. Mission in that town flourished, because it was rooted in intentional prayer.

Mobility or geography is not a limiting factor, when it comes to God.

**I don't know what to say, it's all about preaching and evangelism.**

Yes, it is and no it isn't.

Some people are called to preach and evangelise, but God's mission is much more holistic, which is great news because it means everyone can get involved:

These are The Five Marks of Mission:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service

4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Together, they paint a picture of God's mission.

Which mark do you feel most drawn to? Which one is easiest for you? What is one step you can take today towards mission? Which one rocks your boat?

### **I will mess it up, it won't work.**

People get really worried about things not going to plan, believing that failure isn't an option, but God has a very different view on failure; in fact, in the Old Testament, every time the People of God thought they were succeeding (in being Top Nation), they were slipping away from their mission to be different and they headed for a fall! It was when they felt at their weakest when they listened to God and acted as a Chosen People. Jesus went to the cross, there was death and darkness, but there was resurrection and hope.

As children we learn to walk by falling over and then trying again. God wants us to try, he wants us to grasp opportunities, because he has always taken risks on us, he risked everything to be amongst us. He took risks on Peter, on Paul, on Mary, on Moses, on Amos and they did OK, because God was with them. And God is with us.

And this is our God who you loves without limit, who sees everyone of equal values, who loves both our frailties and our strengths, knows our limits and loves us beyond them.

So, if God is with us, we have everything we need to accept God's invitation to take part in growing the Kingdom of God here in Monmouth.

This is why we are launching @MissionMonmouth today with the hashtag lovewithoutlimit, because this is the God we want to intentionally share in our communities, so that people can encounter the transformational lovewithoutlimit.

Each of you have been given a prayer card this morning and outside there are cards for every member of our congregations so that we can root @Mission Monmouth in prayer to our God whose love is without limit. You can also engage with, share your ideas, plans, projects and follow @MissionMonmouth Lovewithoutlimit on twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Please pick up enough cards to take home with you so that @MissionMonmouth becomes the lifeblood of the diocese.

## **Evangelism Fund**

The Church in Wales launched its Evangelism Fund at Pentecost, which will allow diocese to bid for up to £3 million in funding over 5 years.

### ***What kind of projects is the Fund designed to support?***

The projects funded will be those which, if successful, should aim to:

- Create numerical growth amongst people in age groups under-represented in our churches.
- Create new forms of 'church' which will be attractive to those whom our existing churches are not currently attracting.
- Create significant positive changes in church culture.
- Impact an entire diocese, demonstrably support the diocesan strategy and provide learning for the whole province.

The aim of this Fund is to enable work by people with people. It is not a building fund.

We are in a process of collecting ideas, researching and beginning to pull together our initial thoughts, as to how we as a diocese, might bid for a part of the Evangelism Fund. And you have been a part of this today with the post-it walls.

The funding will allow us to develop new mission projects, but more importantly it acts as a catalyst, a lever to allow us to place mission and discipleship at the heart of all we do as a church.

We have identified 5 areas we want to celebrate and develop

- a. Stands for '**Alleluia!**' -Existing project that are doing great and we want to celebrate
- b. Is for '**Beginnings**' - Existing projects that with support and small amounts of funding could be grown into fully flourishing activity.
- c. '**Can-do**' - New or existing project that have real potential, but need funding, especially for building work, where we will work with third-party funders and other interested parties to make a project viable.
- d. D is for **Dreams**. These are ideas for mission projects that at the moment can't be resourced, but that we want to 'bank' for the future.
- e. E is for projects that will form part of the **Evangelism Bid**

So, it's important to see The Evangelism Fund as a great opportunity, but it's only part of what @MissionMonmouth is about. Just like God's mission @Mission Monmouth must be diverse, holistic, inclusive and an example of lovewithoutlimit. If the Kingdom of God is to grow in Monmouth we must embrace all that God will bring forth.

An important way in which this will happen is by the diocese becoming a learning and sharing community. As I have said there are many brilliant examples of mission going on in Monmouth, but we need to share our knowledge and experience so that we grow together in mission. Being a learning community will allow us to share ideas, experiences and knowledge so that projects could be replicated or developed in different parts of the diocese. They may look and feel differently in different contexts, but lessons learnt are transferable. If someone has already set up a community café and learnt from the joys and struggles of the process, why not share and help other projects achieve their goals, quicker and easier. Let's not re-invent the wheel!

It also gives us a greater feel for all the diversity within the diocese from city, to Valleys, to villages, to suburbs, to towns and countryside, so that we build stronger relationships and deepen our prayers for each other and our communities.

I hope the learning community will embrace all forms of technology as well as the opportunities to meet and share experiences. We are all in this mission together. And we need to celebrate and have fun together, so mission is joyful and hopeful.

I want to thank you all, everyone who has sent in written information, those who have come to Focus Groups, the Mission Group members, the team at the Diocesan Office. And to you for all your work over coffee in covering our Post-It walls with ideas, thoughts, hopes and dreams. For helping us discover what is Mission, in the Diocese of Monmouth.

And let's not forget why we are doing this so that more and more people can encounter the transformational love of God.

That we will be changed, as we deepen our own understanding of God, growing in our own discipleship, prayer and worship.

That people and communities can be changed by knowing a love without limit, by experiencing the gift of hope

That by our witness of words and actions everyone young and old, gay or straight, all ethnicities, all cultures and languages may experience the joy, hope and love that comes from knowing God, creator, redeemer and sustainer.

So let's get out there take risks, dream dreams, pray deeply, talk of hope, show love, worship joyfully and have fun sharing God's  
@MissionMonmouth.

*The Venerable Sue Pinnington  
Archdeacon of the Gwent Valleys and Director of Mission  
20 October 2018*