

Spread the Gospel – it is urgent!

Since our return from the Philippines, where we served as missionaries, we have often wondered about the place of missions in the hearts and minds of our fellow believers. Is missions seen only as the hobby of a few members of the church elected to serve in an "evangelism committee"? Has the sense of urgency been lost? Has complacency set in? I raise these questions only out of concern for the missionary task of the church. A church that does not wholeheartedly engage in missions cannot expect growth and is disobedient to the Great Commission (Matthew 25:19-20) .

Why the lack of urgency? Do we still believe in the lostness of man outside of Jesus Christ? Greg Livingstone, of the North Africa Mission, tells of his conversation with a Christian elder in Lebanon. Livingstone asked, "Don't you care that these Arab Muslims are going to hell?" The elder responded, "Well, brother, between you and me, that probably is the best place for them." An abominable answer! Robertson McQuilkin, who served 12 years as church planter and educator in Japan, comments, "When the shock of such a response passes. we know in the depths of our spirit that this is precisely the way the church of Jesus Christ in each generation has behaved, no matter what the rhetoric."

Why are we not more concerned"? We are busy in our churches with many affairs. We discuss issues ranging from women in ecclesiastical office to liturgy and what constitutes missions. And these concerns are legitimate. But we may not become so preoccupied with so many diverse interests that we lose sight of God's main interest – His desire that none should perish (Ezekiel 33:11).

Acid rain of indifference

Missionary work has never been easy. The church has always faced opposition. And especially today many point out all the obstacles facing the advance of the Gospel. From a human point of view, the task seems nearly impossible. The acid rain of religious indifference has taken its deadly toll.

The onslaught of secular humanism has been fierce. And there seems to be no letup. The growth of the church has been in the pre-modern world, the underdeveloped countries; the losses are in the modern Western world. In the latter the defections from the Christian faith are now rising at the rate of 1, 820.500 former Christians a year or 7,600 church attendees daily. An alarming statistic!

The losses in the West more than outweigh the gains made even in Africa and Asia. The Christian's share of the world's population is shrinking. Just recently I read the disheartening fact that one of every two persons on planet earth lives in a tribe or language group that has no evangelizing church at all. If someone does not go there to spread the Gospel, they will never have the chance to hear about Jesus even once! But man's impossibilities become Gods opportunities.

Today the church is confronted, as in no preceding generation, with a literally worldwide opportunity to make Christ known. Where do we begin with missions? For years mission work was done abroad. Mission boards were called Foreign Mission Boards. The church went to the unreached in far away places. Missionaries pioneered. When they returned home for their furlough, they drew crowds. They had exciting stories to tell about exotic countries, cultures and peoples.

But now they are located in our own countries, perhaps in our towns. When we think about frontier missions we still have in mind grass huts or log cabins, missionaries preaching the Gospel in the shade of a palm tree. But the frontiers are now right where we are. In our own country there are multitudes who have never been touched by the Gospel because of their language and culture.

Canada is no longer predominantly white, Anglo Saxon or French. Refugees and immigrants from Asia and the West Indies have changed Canada's religious and cultural mosaic.

One of the smallest refugee movements in Canada, and one of the most unique, comes from Tibet. There are some 400 of them, mostly in Lindsay, Belleville, Toronto areas of Ontario, with a few families in Montreal, Quebec and Vancouver, BC. They are all Buddhist, who revere the Dalai Lama as the 14th reincarnation of Buddha.

Mission at home

The world is at our doorstep. What a challenge! At times I have been told that we don't need to go out and witness. The doors of the church are open for anyone who wishes to enter. But Jesus never said that we must wait for people to enter through the doors of the church. We must go through the doors of the church, out into the world, to proclaim the Good news of salvation.

If we really care about Christ's mission mandate to the church, then we will put missions back in its rightful place, in the center of the church's planning and prayers. This is not the time for timidity, but for boldness. Malcolm Muggeridge, with his keen eye for things eternal, and with his sharp pen, observed, "Most contemporary Christian missionaries preface any remarks they may have to make about their work by saying that they would never dream of suggesting that Christianity is to be preferred to other religions, and look back with pitying patronage at their predecessors who took more literally the command to go and preach the gospel through the world."

Muggeridge has a point. In the past missionaries have done splendid work in often most trying circumstances without all the helps, technology and equipment modern missionaries have available. They had a vision for the lost. They left home and hearth in obedience to the Great Commission.

May we be spurred on by a holy sense of urgency. "Today is the day of salvation. " If this is true, the church cannot wait for tomorrow to bring the Gospel. I hope that today's

church will recapture this sense of mission urgency. And where does she begin"? The frontiers are in our communities!

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