

SERMON: 7 February 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper

How to Preach Good News

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Mark 1:29-39

Even when faced with success and popularity

Jesus needed to take time out

To be in silence, solitude, and to pray

The Bible tells us that,

those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

(Isaiah 40:31)

It mattered to Jesus because he could've been so easily distracted

He needed to take the time out to reconnect with his purpose

His reason for being

To reconnect with the vision

To be reminded of why he came.

He came to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

And not just in the one place.

He came to set the world on fire

By lighting a tiny spark of hope from synagogue to synagogue

Village to village

He came to show us what he truly means to be human

In the image of God.

After Jesus' death and resurrection and the coming of the Spirit to all flesh
preaching Good News was something his followers felt compelled to carry on.

Like Paul.

Who says, how terrible it'd be if I didn't preach the Gospel

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

(1 Corinthians 9:14).

He boasts that he'd do it for nothing.

He'd rather die than be paid to preach the Good News

I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast.

(1 Corinthians 9:15).

Does this mean preachers should not be paid for preaching? Well he's not saying that directly. In fact in an earlier verse he says that preachers deserve their pay.

In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

(1 Corinthians 9:14)

But Paul didn't take up this right.

Instead he chose to depend on the generosity of local believers.

He wasn't like some of today's mega star conference speakers who demand a large fee for speaking. For Paul that was contrary to the whole meaning of the Gospel. It mattered how the message was packaged and delivered. It wasn't just about the words that were said.

Of course, not every preacher is a mega star conference speaker. I mentioned Shane Claiborne last week and the community he is part of, the Simple Way. When he speaks he doesn't ask for a fee and he never stays in hotels but prefers to depend on the generosity of the local church, staying with people in their homes and sharing bread with them.

And I know someone who regularly preaches and never accepts the fee which they'd be entitled to. Like Paul, they do it for love of the Gospel.

It seems to be human nature that when someone is popular they choose to hang around and enjoy the limelight. If things are going well then why not stick with it and milk it for all it's worth?

It seems that Jesus didn't see things that way. When he's healed the sick and cast out the demons from people, everyone is looking for him.

And what does he do? Does he pander to every need? No he lets go and moves on - because he had sought divine guidance of course - and he knew he wasn't to limit himself to one or two places of popularity.

Better to scatter a few seeds widely than concentrate them all in the one place.

That seems to be the way with God's kingdom - small is beautiful and ultimately most productive.

Paul didn't stick just with the Jews. He shared himself amongst lots of different people.

And whoever he was with, he tried to find common ground.

He became all things to all people is how one translation puts it.

And why?

So that he might bring as many as possible to Christ.

(Greek: Kerdaino - to gain, to win - 5 times in 4 verses).

For Paul, that was what mattered, that was his purpose,

to bring as many as possible to Christ;

to share the revelation of Christ with as many as possible;

so that people would come to know Christ, the life giving spirit, for themselves;

And be transformed into the Christ-like image of God.

Surely nothing else matters but that?

So let's take time out to discover our purpose.

And let's be prepared to be all things to all people - and that will mean setting aside our own prejudices, our own agendas - so that more and more people will discover Christ for themselves.

Let's always try to find common ground with other people.

Let's work for the common good,

because in the end

that will become the Good News of the kingdom of God.