MISSION IN THE 21ST CENTURY 4: LOVING SERVICE

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Category: Mission

This is the fourth in my (rather slow moving) series looking at the five marks of mission; inspired by Mission in the 21st Century edited by Cathy Ross and Andrew Walls.

To Respond to Human Need by Loving Service

Let's start by grabbing a bit of attention: the Great Commission is not Biblical. Let me hurriedly unpack this before I'm declared heretical. The words of Matthew's Gospel which are often called the Great Commission are of course biblical, but the phrase 'great commission' itself is not one that you will find in the Bible. In fact, when Jesus was asked the greatest commandment he did not say anything about making disciples, but actually said:

> *â€œâ€˜You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.â€™ This is the first and greatest commandment.Â A second is equally important: â€˜Love your neighbour as yourself.â€™ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.â€ (Matthew 22:37-40)*

It doesn't take a lot of reflection to realise that our primary call as Christians is not to evangelise the nations or go to the ends of the earth, but to live lives of love for God and our neighbour. Commenting on this Melba Haggay writes:

> *Many of our enterprises as communities of evangelicals are centred on 'evangelism' narrowly understood as proclaiming the hereafter and getting people to come to our side and believe what we believe. Yet Jesus' understanding of what it means to truly obey God has little to do with getting people to assent to our creeds or other such propositions. To follow GOd is to love him with passion and, similarly, to love our neighbour with the same care and total attention that we shower on ourselves. (p. 47)*

To love God involves firstly turning from idols and bringing our lives under the lordship of God. For us in the West this means turning away from the materialism and individualism that typify our society. Secondly, the way in which Jesus combines the two commandments means that we can't love God without loving our neighbour, nor can we truly love our neighbour without loving God. James picks this up very clearly:

> *Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.*

Thirdly, loving God propels us beyond any notions that any community or race can be more important than others.Â This is the clear message of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). (p 48)

The importance of loving service as a part of mission is illustrated in the life of Nelsom Mendala. If it

had not been for mission schools, then he would not have been able to attend school.

> *Such institiouns of social compassion are important in themselves and have their own value and integrity. They are not to be treated as mere means to an end, like evangelism or some such enterprise. (p. 50)*

There is a notion that evangelism itself is a response to the need for social transformation; that changing people will inevitably bring a change to their societies. Unfortunately, this is not always true. Sometimes there are larger, more powerful forces at large in society which war against us. (Ephesians 6:12).

Clearly, loving people will involve proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, but if we are too love our neighbours as ourselves, it will go much further than this.