MISSIONAL THOUGHTS

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These are the notes for a talk that Jane, a friend of ours, gave at a Wycliffe meeting in Switzerland. I think it captures some really important thoughts and I'm very glad that she gave me the opportunity to share it with a wider world.

BIG CLAIM
Jesus left his disciples, his body the Church, with ONE MISSION, for EVERYWHERE and EVERY MEMBER of his body. ACTS 1: 6 â€“ 8, â€œYou shall be my witnessesâ€¦â€ . The mission is essentially the same be it in among the Zulu or the people of Zurich, and the model is Jesus Christ himself, the incarnate God. Chist says in effect, not me, but you. You are my body, you are me for the world. In Paulâ€™s words, all Christians are ambassadors of Christ for the ministry of reconciling the world to God the Father.

Chrst is our model, first in attitude
Luke 15 and Matthew 9.

Jesusâ€™ attitude was one of welcome to the â€œbadâ€ , the social outcasts; welcome and not judgement. He was full of compassion and love for them because he saw their real state, harrassed and helpless sheep with no shepherd to lead or defend them.

He didnâ€™t throw a gospel package in three points to them: first Iâ€™m going to die for your sin then Iâ€™m going to rise from the dead for your new life, you need to repent and believe in meâ€ . He listened to where people were, He listened to God and he met people in their point of need with the message of the kingdom: â€œThe kingdom of God is nearâ€ . God is near, Heâ€™s in charge, He wants to help you. Heâ€™s ready to act.

Jesus was really with people in his spirit, he deeply cared for them and was moved to tears by their plight. Matthew talks of his compassion, not his judgment.
The incarnation says, God the Father is FOR you, on your side. But Jesus is not only our model in attitude, he is alsoâ€¦

Jesus, our model in practice

In these two passages of Luke and Matthew, we see that Jesus was physically with people where they were. He didnâ€™t try to rally everyone to the Temple, he knew that the bad would not feel free to come. He went to where they were, literally. He was concerned for the sheep outside the fold. Not that he didnâ€™t care for those who were inside the fold, really inside. But his call to us is to leave the fold and go to those who are outside till they also come to know that they belong, and in turn go out to find others.

Jesus gave them a message, he gave them words of hope, â€œGod is near you, ready to actâ€ , and then he met them in their plight, incurable sickness, demon possession, bereavement, broken relationships (the woman at Jacobâ€™s well). He told the people what they needed to hear, and he

touched their lives with Godâ€™s kingdom.

One of the best ways we can do this for the harassed and the helpless is ask them if we may pray with and for them in their problems, even before they make any confession of faith in Christ. This is showing that we have heard them, that we care for them, and then it is allowing them to be touched by God, touched by His Kingdom.

Wycliffeâ€™s traditional mode of operation has been one of incarnation, like Christ. We went to where people were, we lived among them, (pitched our tent or mud or cement house among them!) and before we could tell them anything about God, we tried to live among them with love and practical compassion. We tried to be living translations as well as working at a written translation. Many are our colleagues who have prayed with desperate people before they ever came to faith in Christ. Literacy is, or should be, also an expression of compassion. Though we may or may not have conciously realised it, we were seeking to TELL and to TOUCH. I hope we donâ€™t lose this attitude in our new paradigms.

A personal journey

When I returned from the field to live in Switzerland I was perplexed at the lack of relevance of the Church in peoplesâ€™ lives. I really felt we were on the sidelines, not on the pitch in the midst of the game. It took me about 7 years to start a journey towards an understanding of where we were at. And it took even longer, another 5 years, to become conscious of the fact that what I had as my ideal for the people we worked among on the field, I did not practise back in Europe (Switzerland), and as far as I could see, neither did the Church. Somehow in Europe we had a model of â€œevangelismâ€ (making a foray into the world to leave it with a message, then retreating back into the safety of Church), whereas for missionary work we had a model of incarnation.

This paradigm shift has in a sense turned my life inside out, though its consequences are taking time to be worked out in practice. Iâ€™m on an apprenticeship! But seeking to emulate Christ in the way he approached people has given me joy and freedom in my relationships with others.

The contacts I had during the period when I was researching into the Emerging Church worldwide, in 2007, showed me that many pastors in francophone Switerland, were becoming aware that the Church had become side-lined and too inward looking, and that things needed to change if the Gospel, the Good News, were once again to be heard and understood. A New Zealand pastor told me â€œthe church here has lost the plot.â€

Here is an opportunity for Wycliffe members, you and me, to humbly walk alongside our churches, our communities, as they grapple with the huge paradigm shift that they see needs to be made.
Plentiful harvest, but few workers
These are words that have usually been applied to missionary workâ€¦ for the Zulus, not for Zurich! But is that what Jesus is saying here? I donâ€™t think so. I think he is talking about everywhere, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria just as much as the ends of the earth. And when you think about it, are

we not as much in need around us here in Switzerland, as over there?

Donâ€™t get me wrong: Iâ€™m not saying at all that over here is more important than over there. But we need to relate to the Church that is here.

I believe that the church in the West is rediscovering the Mission of God. Many pastors and leaders are no longer satisfied with living the reality of the body of Christ turned in among themselves and nice and comfy. As one pastor said to me, â€œwe need to stop playing at churchâ€ . This does not mean that they are not concerned with mission overseas. They are just realising that it isnâ€™t happening here; that for most people, mission is for the specialists, the chosen few, instead of being a logical outworking of being a member of the body of Christ.

As Kirk Franklin said recently in a missiological conference in South Africa: the mission of God is bigger than the church. And I would add that it is a lot bigger than Wycliffe. And the church is bigger than Wycliffe too, and bigger than Vision 2025. But it is through the Church that God wants to accomplish His mission, through all of his followers. I believe that when the Church in the West has caught this vision, and it is catching it right now, then the vision for mission overseas will also be caught, but it will be part of the same whole, not a separate entity for the â€œyou are such wonderful peopleâ€ people.

So how are we relating to the Church within Wycliffe, and here in Switzerland? Are we just bossing them around by telling them that they really have to adopt Vision 2025? Or are we humbly asking them if they agree? I wonder if we approached them with that attitude, whether they would not take much more initiative in responding? I also wonder if we donâ€™t need to give the Church here time to take the bend in the road they are on?

Maybe that would give us a better perspective of where we fit, and of whoâ€™se in charge. Why does Jesus say we should pray about the lack of workers for Godâ€™s mission? Well, it may well be so that we feel challenged ourselves, but primarily I think that it is to remind us that itâ€™s GODâ€™S mssion, not ours, not the Churchâ€™s, but GODâ€™S. Maybe we need to learn to rest in that. Have a restful attitude, not do nothing!

I believe we can come alongside the Church as they rediscover total, incarnational mission in the manner of Christ. I believe Jesus wants to bring unity to the vision of the Church, reigniting a vision for mission everywhere, by everyone, here AND there, until the earth is filled with the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea. Thy kingdom come, O Lord. AMEN.