SERVICE, JUSTICE, PROCLAMATION AND BALANCE

Posted on April 3, 2014 by Eddie

What is the point of distinguishing between works of service and proclamation of Good News?
Category: Mission



A couple of days ago, I tweeted this:

> *I believe in justice, works of service, caring for the planet ... I just wish more people would tweet about proclaiming the Gospel!*
>
> *â€" Eddie Arthur (@kouya) April 1, 2014*

This seemed straightforward enough to me, but a wee while later I received the following response:

> *if you read Luke 4, 18-19 I am not sure where the big difference lies.*

I found this statement rather frustrating. Partly because the verses cited (much less the wide sweep of Scripture) don't support the point my correspondent was making, but mainly because it reflects what seems to me to be messy thinking about the Church's mission.

Let me be clear, I believe that mission involves both social action and proclamation of the message of Christ. I've blogged on the Five Marks of Mission, which spell this out and I've gone into some length as to why I believe in the social development side of the work that my organisation does. You can't proclaim the message of Christ without serving people, but service without proclamation is equally short-sighted. So, if works of service, struggling for justice and proclamation are all important, why distinguish between them? Why not just agree with my twitter correspondent that there isn't a big difference?

The point is balance. In my experience in mission, evangelicals have rarely held the different aspects of mission in an appropriate tension. There was a time when any sort of works of service were dismissed as 'social Gospel' and the only sort of mission that was regarded as legitimate was proclamation. Today, I fear that we have gone in the opposite direction and prioritised service and justice ministries at the expense of telling people about the Good News of Jesus. We need to distinguish between the two so that we look at what we are doing and to ensure that our mission has an appropriate balance.

I'll return to this theme in the next day or two.