ALL OF THE WORLD

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WordsÂ are slippery things. They meanings change and shift with time; you can't really tie them down.

Take the word "mission" (I'm thinking in the Christian sense, here, not the Tom Cruise one). There are those who use to mean something very exact; I collect definitions of mission (not the most exciting hobby, I grant you). However, most people use it in a rather sloppy, loose fashion. Once upon a time, mission was what rather odd people (missionaries) did in foreign parts, while at home we did evangelism. However, these days, as the world changes, more and more people talk about mission at home or mission on our doorsteps. You no longer have to go to the ends of the world to do mission, you can do it down across the street. In fact, the change is so profound, that for many people, the word mission has lost its international sense altogether. Mission is what our church does in the neighbourhood.

On one hand, I think this is wonderful. The dichotomy between evangelism and mission was always a false one and it's good to see it vanishing. On the other, I think it's a minor disaster; losing the international sense of mission is a huge mistake.

Ah, but people tell me that the need in the UK is so great that we can't afford to send people overseas anymore. We have to witness to Jesus in our own situations.

Well, yes. But let's face facts. There are millions, billions even, of people around the world who have never heard about Jesus and who will never meet a Christian unless something drastic changes.Â Whatever the needs in the UK and the rest of the West, they are dwarfed by the situation in many parts of the world. There is a Christian witness here; it's you and me! But there are parts of the world where there are no virtually no believers. We cannot turn our backs on these places.

The places where there are no Christians are tough; that's why there are so few believers there.Our current mission structures and strategies probably won't work in some places in the Gulf or in Asia; so we need some new strategies or structures. In some places, Christians areÂ persecuted; expatriate missionaries are banned, imprisoned and even killed, but since when was that a reason not to go and tell people about Jesus?

Yes, mission is about reaching out to our neighbours to witness to Jesus in word and deed, but it's also about going to the ends of the world to do exactly the same thing.

> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

If we don't get beyond our own Jerusalem and Judea, we are being disobedient to our Lord.

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