THE CROSS IS CENTRAL TO MISSION

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When Jesus spoke to his disciples immediately before his ascension, he told them;

> *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

The key word I want to highlight here isÂ *witness*. Christians are to be witnesses to Jesus; that is we have to tell people what Jesus did and said. For the first disciples this was relatively easy, they knew him, they had walked with him and they had seen his actions at first hand. We don't have the benefit of that first hand experience (though, like them, we do have the power of the Spirit).

However, we do have the Gospels; four accounts of the life of Jesus written by close associates, each one focussing on different aspects. We can't be first hand witnesses of Jesus actions, but we can tell the story of the Gospels. Key to any telling of the Gospel stories, is Jesus' death and resurrection. If we only talk about Jesus as a moral teacher or a miracle worker we are, at best, partial witnesses; we aren't telling the full story.

Likewise, if we demonstrate the love of Jesus by caring for people, working for justice, feeding the hungry without explaining why he died and rose again, then we are missing much of the point.

Jesus was a remarkable teacher, the best ever, and he is an amazing example to follow; but he is much more than that. By dying and rising again, Jesus made it possible for sinful human beings to be forgiven and for all things in heaven and on earth to be reconciled to God. Mission which doesn't include this message doesn't really deserve to be calledÂ mission, in the first place.

It may not be fashionable, but people need to be brought to a place where they understand that they are alienated fromÂ God; that they need to be forgiven and reconciled to him and that this can only be achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus.Â We need to be aware that people experience this alienation from God in different ways and we need to explain the Gospel message in a way that speaks to people, where they are. However, the underlying need is the same as is the solution to that need.