THINGS HOME MISSION CAN LEARN: GO!

Posted on November 20, 2017 by Eddie

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Category: Church: UK

When push comes to shove, there is one basic difference between long-term, cross-cultural missionaries and the average church member. The missionary got on an aeroplane (or boat...) and went somewhere for an extended period, with a particular purpose in mind. Sure, there are lots of other differences in terms of background and experience, but they all flow out of this one decision to get up and go.

A very simple lesson can be drawn from this: if you want to reach people with the Gospel, you have to be where they are. This applies in Bingley, just as much as it does in Bangkok or Bahrain. Let me unpack this a little.

A decade or so ago, it was common to write about the difference between missional and attractional churches. The former went out to where people are, while the latter waited for people to come to them. I've overstated the definitions in order to make a point, but, in any case, I'm not sure that the distinction is a useful one. The term I think is most helpful in this context is intentionality. Missionaries are very intentional when they get on a plane to fly to the other side of Â the world to share the Gospel, and we need to be just as intentional in the UK context.

Christmas is coming; so let's think about how this could play out with regard to the traditional evangelistic carol service.

One approach might be to get permission to hold a service in the local pub on a Sunday evening. Carols and beer is a well known cultural tradition and as long as the venue was well chosen, you would be going to where people are. However, there is unlikely to be an opportunity for a traditional Christmas evangelistic sermon as part of the festivities. If a talk is given it will need to be well thought through and appropriately contextualised (more of this in a later post). This sort of thing could push many churches and ministers well out of their comfort zones.

Another approach would be to hold a more traditional service with a suitable sermon in the Church building or a neutral venue. This is more familiar ground, but it will only work if the congregation go out of their way to invite people to attend. This still pushes people out of their comfort zones!

The carols in the pub might seem moreÂ *missional* (or trendy) and the church-based service rather traditional. However, both can be effective, but only if there is an intentionality about making them work. A sing-song over a beer or two is all very well, but there needs to be a gospel element and a passionate gospel proclamation lacks something if the whole congregation are believers.

However we go about mission in the UK, it depends on people making intentional decisions to get out of their comfort zones, to meet people, to make relationships and to share the Gospel with them, or invite them to an event.

Some people find this easier than others, either because of circumstances or temperament, but most people struggle. The point is, that in order to effectively reach out, the whole church community has to be intentionally involved in evangelism in one way or another. It can't be left to

the minister.

So what has world mission got to contribute to this?

Stories: people are generally motivated more by stories than by facts or argument. There are tons and tons of great stories from cross-cultural mission about ordinary people who saw God do great things through them. Mission partners or visiting missionaries can be a huge encouragement to people who are working to become intentional about home mission (more on this below). If no missionaries are available, then churches can gain a great deal from reading mission biographies together. How about studying one of Elizabeth Elliot's books?

Mobilisation: many mission agencies have adopted the role of mission mobiliser, a term that I roundly dislike, while really appreciating the function. The role of the mobiliser is to spend time with people, guiding them and encouraging them on their journey into world mission. It seems to me, that this function (if not a specific role) is very much needed in churches in the UK today. Most of us need encouragement as we seek to reach out to our neighbours and colleagues. We need someone to pray for us, to chivvy us along and to support us when things go slowly (as they will). We can't expect the minister to get alongside every church member in this way; so this needs to be something that happens in small groups, prayer triplets or what-have-you; but we have to be intentional about it. If mission is to be a part of our church life, then mission mobilisation needs to be part of our life, too.

A couple of thoughts in closing.

If you never accept your neighbours' or colleagues' invitations to go to the pub or to a football match, why would you expect them to accept your invitations to attend a Carol Service?

A word to missionary speakers. All too often, missionaries go to churches with the (hidden?) agenda of drumming up support or finance for themselves or their agency. In other words, a large part of their motivation is to bless themselves rather than the church they are visiting (controversial, I know). Do what you can to encourage the church in its mission at home and overseas and don't worry about the support. Your job is to make disciples wherever you go, not raise money.

Posts In This Series

- Introduction:Â I believe that the skills and experience of cross-cultural missionaries are crucial to the future of the church in the UK: the start of a blog series....
- Go:Â When push comes to shove, there is one basic difference between long-term, cross-cultural missionaries and the average church member. ...
- Study:Â How well do we understand the culture that surrounds us?...
- Contextualise:Â When Paul spoke to a Jewish audience, he started off with the story of the Jewish nation, when speaking to Greeks, he worked from inscriptions on statues and Greek poetry. ...

- Serve:Â If you just preach the word but donâ€™t do the deeds then you are not credible, if you just do the deeds without preaching the word then you are not audible....
- Don't Look Down: Looking down on a class of people, and holding them in contempt for their reading habits, has far more to do with liberal, middle-class prejudice than it has to do with Christianity.Â ...
- Speak:Â To a newcomer, a phrase such as "we will now enter into a time of worship" conveys far more background information about the person using it than it does about what is going to happen next in the service. ...
- Religion:Â Learn from people who have been there and done that....
- Stories:Â Taking one of Jesus' amazingly creative parables and turning it into an alliterated, three-point, logical sermon has to be the ultimate in literate processing. ...
- Pray:Â It would be easy - very easy - for a Western rationalist to dismiss all of this. I'm a biologist, I know what causes diseases! ...