HUMBLE MISSION

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If we are to be truly humble in mission, the western church will need to rethink it's strategies, goals and Perspectives and get back to studying the Scriptures with people from other parts of the world and seeking God's strategies, goals and perspectives.
Category: Observations

Last week, I was asked to lead a seminar on the subject of humble mission with the following strapline:

> *Humble mission: what is the role of the European church in Mission?Â Can we overcome barriers from our colonial past?*

The first thing that struck me is that the Western church brings an awful lot of pre-conceived notions and strategies to the table when we talk about mission. Whether it isÂ *our* definitions of the priorities of mission,Â *ourÂ* strategies and deadlines for mission orÂ *ourÂ* Perspectives on the World Christian Movement. If we are going to be humble in our encounter with other Christians, we need to dump all of this stuff and to start studying the Scriptures with believers from other parts of the world and to gain a joint understanding of what the Bible is calling us to, rather than thinking we know it all, already. So, I decided that the best way to lead the seminar was actually to recast it as a Bible study. What follows are my barely edited notes for that study. The discussion didn't exactly follow what I had in my notes - but that was the whole point of the exercise, to listen to what brothers and sisters from other contexts were saying.

UNKNOWN PEOPLE

One of the most important events in the book of Acts occurs in Chapter 11 when the message of Jesus is shared directly with Gentiles. Up till this point, the only people who had become believers in Jesus were either Jews or people closely connected to the Jewish religion such as the God-fearing Roman Centurion, Cornelius. The fact that Gentiles had become believers was earth-shattering and set the stage for the whole future of the church. If the Gospel hadnâ€™t expanded out of the Jewish bubble and into the Gentile world, most of us wouldnâ€™t know anything about Jesus. It was so amazing that bystanders had to come up with a new word to describe followers of Jesus. Previously, it had been clear that they were simply part of a Jewish sect â€“ but now there were Jesus followers who were clearly not Jewish â€“ so a new description was needed and so people started calling the group Christians.

God worked to change the world completely at Antioch. However, the amazing thing is that he did so through a group of anonymous people.

> *19Â Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killedÂ traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch,Â spreading the word only among Jews.Â 20Â Some of them, however, men from CyprusÂ and Cyrene,Â went to AntiochÂ and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good newsÂ about the Lord Jesus.Â 21Â The Lordâ€™s hand was with them,Â and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*

This is one of the most important events in the whole history of the church and we donâ€™t even know the names of the people involved!

The thing is, this is true of mission today. There is a whole industry dedicated to telling us about the work of Western mission agencies. Magazines, emails, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are all used to tell us about the work of missionaries â€“ the majority of whom are from Europe or North America. However, the church is expanding around the world faster than it has ever done in history â€“ and most of the people who are involved in mission will never see their name mentioned in mission books or on agency Instagram posts.

There is a whole army of men and women all around the world, sharing the Gospel with their neighbours; travelling to new regions as traders or refugees and talking about Jesus as they go. They arenâ€™t professional missionaries â€“ but they are responsible for most of the mission work that is going on today.

Their names wonâ€™t appear in the pages of the of the mission history books, but it is written in the Lambâ€™s book of Life and that is enough!

Unexpected People

Alongside the anonymous people, God also used some unexpected ones. Think about the Apostle Paul, who made the transition from someone who wanted to murder Christians to being a much-travelled missionary. However, Iâ€™d like to point out someone else, letâ€™s look at Acts 18.

> *24Â Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos,Â a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.Â He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.Â 25Â He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervorÂ and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.Â 26Â He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and AquilaÂ heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.*
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> *27Â When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia,Â the brothers and sistersÂ encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.Â 28Â For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the ScripturesÂ that Jesus was the Messiah.*

Apollos is a fascinating character. He was born in Africa, trained for ministry with Priscilla and Aquilla in Asia and went on to be a missionary in Europe. 2,000 years ago he was a global citizen and he turned out to be a very effective missionary.

The thing about Apollos is that he seems to have come out of nowhere. He didnâ€™t emerge from

one of the centres of Christianity such as Antioch or Jerusalem. He was also keen to learn and to be involved in what God was doing.

There are many unexpected people in mission today. We might have an idea of what a missionary looks like. Perhaps you think of an older person wearing slightly old-fashioned clothes or maybe a smiling young person helping out with orphans in a camp in Africa. Whatever you think of, it is likely that your idea of a missionary is likely to a white person. However, the majority of Christians in the world today are not European, American or Australian. The Church is biggest and growing fastest in Africa, Asia and Latin America and more and more people from these parts of the world are getting involved in mission. If you join a traditional mission agency, you are likely to find yourself working alongside Koreans, Nigerians or Brazilians. Missionaries who donâ€™t come from the West and who donâ€™t have the political and social baggage that comes with being a Westerner are able to work in countries which would be closed or very unsafe for people like me.

These missionaries bring new attitudes, new ideas and a willingness to think in ways that those of us from more traditional settings are unable or unwilling to contemplate.

Getting involved in world-mission gives you the opportunity to work alongside people from all over the globe and to learn from their experiences. Your life will be incredibly enriched by rubbing shoulders with people from different languages, cultures and world-views. Being involved in world mission gives you a taste of Revelation 7 here on the earth. Youâ€™d be a fool not to get involved.

If you are a church leader and you want to bless, encourage and expand the vision of your church, commission some of your young people to go and work in a multi-cultural team. The amount they learn and grow will be a blessing to the whole fellowship, not just to the missionaries themselves.