WHERE ARE THE ENDS OF THE EARTH?

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Where are the ends of the earth? It all depends on where you start from!
Category: Observations

> *'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.â€™*

This passage from Acts 1:8 is well worn in mission circles. It is one of the "go-to" passages for mission mobilisers when they try to enthuse people to support mission in one way or another. A few days ago, I wrote a post looking at "being witnesses for Jesus". Today, I'd like to briefly look at the ends of the earth.

Generally, Jesus words "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" are taken to imply that mission should be local (Jerusalem), regional (Judea and Samaria) and international (ends of the earth). I'm not entirely convinced that we can take this quite so definitively; It seems to me that Jesus could equally be using a figure of speech to mean "everywhere". In the end, the impact is the same, it's just that by my reading mission is seen as a whole, rather than fragmented into three aspects.

Quite often the term "ends of the earth" is used in an almost pejorative manner to describe places which are a long way from us physically and metaphorically; deserts, jungles and exotic places. However, the thing with "the ends of the earth" is that it all depends where you are starting from. The rainforests of Papua New Guinea may seem like the ends of the earth if you are starting off from Barnsley, but less so if you live in West Papua. For people living in the Pacific, South Yorkshire may well seem like the "ends of the earth". The thing is, when there are believers all around the world, the "ends of the earth" is also all around the globe. Mission is from everywhere to everywhere because there are believers (just about) everywhere and there is certainly a need absolutely everywhere. Which brings us back to why I prefer reading Acts 1:8 the way I do.

Another way that people read this passage is to say that the "ends of the earth" consist of those places where people haven't heard about Jesus; where people are "unreached" as the jargon goes. I think there is some value in this approach, but I don't think we can take it as an absolute. One of the problems is defining exactly what the word "unreached" means. There are a number of competing definitions which shows that this isn't as straightforward as it might appear at first glance. A second problem is that people keep having babies and there is a need to "make disciples" in every generation. One of the ways that people deal with this is to say that a group are reached when there is a church who are capable of making disciples locally. This is usually calculated by saying that when there is a certain population of Evangelical Christians the people group are reached (I'll ignore the difficulty of measuring how many Evangelicals there are anywhere for the moment).

The problem is, that just because there is a church in an area it does not mean that it is capable of reaching out and making disciples amongst its own people. Let's be blunt, the church in Europe (including the UK) has not been doing this effectively for a number of generations now. This part of

the world might be considered "reached", but for all sorts of reasons the church is struggling to maintain itself, much less reach out to its own people. The "ends of the earth" are here!

When we say that mission is from everywhere to everywhere, we are making a statement about the interdependency of the church worldwide. We need each other. The church in the UK has a long history of sending people out to our "ends of the earth" which is a good thing. However, we also need people to come here, to their "ends of the earth".

Where are the "ends of the earth"?

You are sitting in them.