

Sermon preached by Emma Hodge at St. Michael and All Angels Church, Sandhurst on Sunday 25th September 2016 (18th After Trinity)

My Gracious Master and My God, Assist me to Proclaim, and spread through all the earth abroad the honours of thy name. **Amen**

Today is the third in our series of "**Mission Shaped Church**", so far we have looked at "A Vision for Mission"; "Becoming a Mission Shaped Church" and the theme for today is "A Mission Strategy".

[What is Mission Strategy](#)

The theme of "Mission Strategy" will conjure up different ideas to each one of us. Mission, in the context of the church, is being sent by Jesus to carry the message of Jesus to others while "strategy" is the plan of how we tell others about Jesus and it includes carrying out the plans, however, we also need to listen and obey God so that they are HIS plans and not ours which we plan and carry out.

Mission Strategy is not just about making plans and then carrying them out, and it is definitely not just a job for the clergy or the PCC, rather it is about all of us who are members of the body of Christ. St Matthew did not end his gospel with these words "All priests need to make disciples of those who come to church and teach those things you agree with, to those that come to you" Instead he says "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, ... and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you"¹. There is no caveat saying that it only applies to some people, it is for ALL of US – that is everyone who believes – and we are sent out into the wider world. God has blessed each one of us with the necessary skills and opportunities to spread the message often in very small ways, for example that unplanned phone call you made to check on a friend is putting the message into action, and as the saying goes "actions speak louder than words" however things usually work better if there is a plan, even if plans need to be changed.

Our reading from Acts is a small example of someone who had a mission strategy and carried it out while making changes as necessary to ensure that he could easily get his message over to the people who were hearing it so that they could respond and that his message would reach as many people as possible.

[Get to know the place so we can relate to it](#)

St. Paul was on his second missionary journey, which started in Antioch in Syria, travelled through Turkey and mainland Greece to Athens and our reading today from Acts joins St. Paul shortly after he arrives in Athens alone, while he was waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him. St Paul had a plan and he knew that his message was sometimes received well while at other times it was not well received.

As soon as St. Paul arrived in Athens, the first thing he did was get to know the city.

¹ Matthew 28:19-20

Athens then, just as it is now, attracted visitors, and St. Paul did what a lot of visitors do, he visited the temples that were there. Athens had lots of temples all dedicated to different gods, even one dedicated to "an unknown God". St Paul found that as well as a Jewish community, there was also a large community of Philosophers and other groups. St. Paul needed to understand Athens so that he could relate the message of Jesus to the people of Athens.

This also applies to us at St. Michael's, we need to ensure we understand how we can relate the message of salvation which Jesus gave us to the people of Sandhurst, each one of us sees and knows a different aspect of our community, it could be that we see people who are lonely and isolated, those who are struggling with the ill-health of their parents, or coping with a new stage in their lives, we could also be in one of these situations, and each situation is unique, however the message of Jesus is the same. Each of us also interacts with a unique group of people each situation and each group provides us with an opportunity to share the message in some way-.

[Tried and tested!](#)

So back to our story from Acts....

After St. Paul learnt about the city, he first went to the synagogue so that he could speak to the Jewish community. This was part of the plan and had been tried and tested in other cities with different measures of success, St. Paul told the Jewish community how Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and that Jesus was the promised messiah. This was part of the plan that didn't change. It was his starting point for telling people in Athens about Jesus however it was not enough.

The same situation is true for us. As a church, our starting point, is this beautiful church where people come for weddings, baptisms, funerals and services and at each one of them, they hear part of the message of our faith, obviously this is a good starting point and we all meet God and come to know him and develop our relationship with him through our worship here, but it also is not enough, as a church, we need to reach out into the community both corporately and as individuals. As followers of Jesus, we are sent out into the world to tell people about God and Jesus through words and actions.

[Something New!](#)

So back to our story from Acts....

As St. Paul had discovered, the city was not just full of Jewish people, Athens had a large community of philosophers and other groups. St. Paul realised that he had to get to know them, so he started speaking to individuals about the message, this was a change to the plan. In other cities he had not actively engaged with non-Jewish people. Once St. Paul got to know people on an individual basis, he was then invited to speak to a larger group. This is the first time that a sermon to the gentiles (or non-

Jewish people) is recorded in Acts. St Paul changed his plan so that he could engage with non-Jewish people.

This relates to us at St. Michael's, both as individuals and as a church. As a church, there are formal occasions where we engage with people who do not come to church, for example, when John goes into schools, however we cannot leave it just to the clergy to do this, each of us have several more informal occasions where we engage with people who do not know Jesus and each of us have a challenge to tell others about our faith.

Obviously this is easier said than done, however occasions do happen when something comes up in conversation where we can tell others a bit about our faith or invite them to come to church, We need to be open to God using us and to seek opportunities where we can tell others. However we do not just to have to rely on using words, we can also put our faith into action and it does not need to be complex or grand, it can be as simple as insisting on fair trade products in a shop, club, or office, or it could be by offering to help in church by welcoming people for example, the main point is that we need to allow ourselves to be used by God so that they can hear the message of God for themselves.

However we can only be used by God to spread the news of Jesus by God's help and encouragement in our own lives, as our next hymn puts it "My Gracious Master and My God, Assist me to Proclaim, **Assist** me to Proclaim, to spread thro' all the earth abroad, the honours of your name"² When Charles Wesley wrote these words he knew that each of us need help from God to tell others about the Salvation that comes through knowing and loving Jesus.

Summary

In Summary, St. Paul had three parts to his mission strategy in Athens

- 1) Get to know the city.
- 2) Start with the familiar
- 3) Change the plan to try something new.

For us as a church and as individuals, there are similar points

- 1) We need to understand our community and the issues facing people. Even if you have lived in Sandhurst all your life, people, the community and the issues they face have changed and there are a variety of challenges, it may be bringing up children with the dangers of the internet or it may be people being isolated and loneliness.
- 2) We need to start, and continue, with the familiar which in our case is, inviting, encouraging and supporting others to come to church for example -
- 3) We need to try new things to ensure that the message continues to reach as many people as possible so that they will come to know Jesus and follow him and his teaching in their lives.

² "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing" Words Charles Wesley, Tune "Lyngham" by Thomas Jarman.

And last but by no means least

- 4) We need to pray. Prayer needs to be at all stages, we especially need to pray for ourselves and each other as we go out to spread the good news and live our lives so others may see Christ in us and be attracted to find out more.

Closing prayer

I am going to close with a variation on a prayer that may be familiar to some of us

Bless, O Lord, us Thy servants who meet in your church, Grant that what we say and sing with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.