

## **Becoming a mission shaped church – Luke 24:44 to 49 – 9.30 am**

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer  
Amen

Today I'm preaching on the second of the four sermons in the series on a "Mission shaped church".

For the purpose of defining a mission shaped church I am going to contrast it against a maintenance shaped church.

A maintenance shaped church is inward looking, resists which it sees as unnecessary change and exists for its members, in the same way that a sports club exists for its members, it doesn't normally recruit as such, but it welcomes new members.

A mission shaped church is outward looking, embraces necessary change to stay relevant to the community it serves, it actively tries to speak to as many non Christians as possible to spread the gospel of Christ, in doing so recruits more people and as it expands it is able to speak to even more people.

The gospel reading chosen in support of a mission shaped church is St Luke's chapter 24 verses 44 to 49 our gospel reading.

This series of four subjects concerning mission are also being discussed at house groups; so perhaps this is the opportunity to see if you like the idea of going to a house group, because now that we are on our second of four sermons you know that you will only need to attend three meetings.

If you don't belong to a house group and would like to try one then please come to the church at 7.30 on Tuesday evening where a house group is meeting for the duration of these four sermons.

Our purpose as a church is; "Knowing God for ourselves", "Growing as individuals and as a church", and "Showing God's love in the world". This definition can be found on the opening page of our web site.

And today I am going to concentrate on the third expression of our purpose, namely, "Showing God's love in the world", because my sermon title is "Becoming a mission shaped church", and it is only as a missionary church that we can reach out and show God's love in the world.

Now directly we talk about mission, or missionary work, many people pull the shutters down, because people think it is about going out and preaching the gospel or answering difficult questions about some obscure passage in the Bible, but as we have seen from our third mission statement it isn't about that it's about showing God's love in the world.

But to be a mission shaped church we need to be outward looking rather than inward looking because mission means going out into the wider world and encouraging people, who do not know about the healing and saving grace of God through repentance and God's forgiveness, to come into church and hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

However we mustn't lose sight of the fact that to show God's love in the world we must know what God's love is, and the first verse of our reading from Luke's gospel tells us that the Bible contains his words.

The actual verse reads, "Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you'", and of course the words Jesus spoke to them and which speaks to us are those recorded in the New Testament.

I recently read a tribute for the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and near the beginning of the book were these words, "For Christians, the Bible is the most valuable thing on earth because it is God's message to all mankind. It shows us what God is like. It reveals his love and commitment to us, what his son has done for us, how we can know and enjoy him, and how we can live and love in his ways".

But in reading the New Testament we mustn't lose sight of the Old Testament, because Jesus goes on to say.

"That everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled" in other words the Old Testament also contains descriptions of the nature of God.

It is the words in the New and Old Testament which give us a clearer insight to what it means when we refer to God's love.

There is of course no short cut to knowing the love of God, we do not have to be able to recite the Bible off-by-heart but we must know what it means when we say showing God's love in the world.

We will only understand what God's love actually means by faithfully reading the Bible and having things we do not understand explained to us, and the exposition of the Bible comes within church services, and these days also in house groups.

And that brings us to another aspect of our reading from Luke's gospel, and that is verse 45, "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures".

In John's gospel chapter 20 verse 21 is recorded Jesus' first visit to the upper room where Jesus said "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them. 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

Jesus opened their minds to the scriptures through the power of the Holy Spirit, and as baptised Christians our minds too have been opened to the scriptures by the power of the Holy Spirit, but to make use of that knowledge and to be able to go out into the world in God's love we will undoubtedly need faith.

We can not go out and tell people the good news of Christ, and have doubts ourselves, people will see through us very quickly.

One of the differences between a maintenance church and a mission church may well be that in the maintenance church they've lost sight of the need to go out to the community and talk about God's love, whereas in a mission shaped church people are more outward going and do go out into the community and talk about the good news of Christ.

But like most churches I'm sure, we at St Michael's are both a maintenance church and a mission church because there are those who do go out into the world, and talk about their faith.

From my personal experience when we ran the Alpha Courses here at St Michael's some 150 or more people attended the courses and about 50 people from our church were involved at some stage with running them, and today there are some people running start courses and confirmation courses.

Running courses such as these is an example of mission work, no one has to do this work on their own. When Jesus sent his disciples out to do mission work he sent them out in pairs, it is always much better to work in teams than on your own.

A healthy church may well need to be both a mission shaped church and to some extent a maintenance based church that faithfully preaches and demonstrates the complete gospel of Christ to its members, but nevertheless mission should undoubtedly dominate and take most of our resources.

The reason for these four series of sermons is that St Michael's has the wrong balance, and needs to be more outward looking and do much more missionary work, because it is in mission that we are in obedience to God's command, and it is in mission that we will grow rather than shrink which is what is happening to us at the moment.

At verse 46 Jesus said to his disciples, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, and this same command also finishes St Matthew's gospel.

There is no doubt what so ever that as Disciples of Christ, which is what we are, we have been given clear instructions to go out into the world and tell people about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Messiah, and that through repentance Christ will forgive our sins.

Let me quote again from the tribute written to celebrate the Queens 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. This quote is from the Queens 2011 Christmas speech, it is headed 'Forgiveness'. "Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love."

And my post script to that would be for a mission shaped church, "That it is in forgiving that we show a significant part of God's love in the world."

Moving on, verse 48 reads, "You are witnesses of these things."

For us it is through faith that we are witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and it is through faith that we are to speak about what we know to be true, it will be through faith that we will become true Disciples of Christ and show God's love in the world.

So let us all take courage and step out in faith and tell our families, our friends and our neighbours of the great joy, fellowship and love we receive, and give, through having a relationship with Christ who, through his death and resurrection, forgives our sins and frees us from the pain of guilt and releases us into a creative future free from the burdens of sin.

As we sit let us pray,  
 Gracious God,  
 we thank you that you have brought us to know and recognise you  
 through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
 We thank you for those who shared the gospel of Jesus with us.  
 We ask that in turn we may pass the Good News on to others.  
 Give us confidence to speak of you,  
 sensitivity to walk with others on their journey,  
 and love to inspire us to reach out to others.  
 Most of all, give us a passion to see your kingdom come,  
 that we might take risky steps to be your witnesses to your world.  
 Through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen