

St John's Harborne APCM 2023

Chairman's Address – Leonard Browne

I'm not sure how many of you will know that the Church of England has for many years set out its understanding of contemporary mission by way of what has become known as the five marks of mission—mark which are used globally within Anglicanism. Here they are:

- To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom
- To teach baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

These five marks of mission have sometimes being abbreviated to 5 words: tell; teach; tend; transform; treasure.

Here's the definition of mission from churches together:

Mission (Missio Dei) is the total redeeming work of God—father son and Holy Spirit—in saving, healing, restoring and renewing the world. The church is invited to join in this adventure.

And finally here is Tom Wright's definition:

Mission is about colonising the earth with the life of heaven call ma so that one day, whenever the Lord wills, the old earth will be healed and renewed. God's renewed people will reign with Jesus over his new world, peace and life will subdue hostility and death call mark and God will be all in all.

So as the Church our perspective is eternal. Our hope is in new creation, begun in and through the redeeming work of Jesus, which will culminate in the new heaven and new earth. For now we are invited to join in this new creation project, as God's representatives, bringing the future life of the kingdom into reality here and now by the power of the Spirit. That's the sense in which we are a colony of heaven – heaven meaning God's dimension of reality – we bring the redeeming transforming life of God into the present, as a foretaste of what one day will be a totally renewed creation.

Now as you will imagine, returning to the definition contained in the five marks of mission, if we are to be a faithful Church, then we need to give

emphasis to all those areas. In our current global and cultural climate, some of these areas resonate with society more than others: many non-Christian humanitarian organisations seek to respond to human need, by way of service; the desire to transform unjust structures in society is not the preserve of the Church, and nor is the pursuit of peace and reconciliation; and of course the commitment to look after creation is something that individuals and organisations beyond the Christian community are fully committed to. The primary motivation may differ – as Church we are committed to these things because we believe that they flow from the call of God to us to live out His sustaining and transforming love in seeking to care for others and for creation. Nonetheless, being involved in those pursuits will often mean that we are rubbing shoulders with others who want the same sort of thing, even if they do not see their motivation as being divinely inspired.

That leaves us with the first two marks of mission; to Tell, and to Teach. The call ‘to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom’ and ‘to teach baptise and nurture new believers’. Now you don’t need me to tell you that these two marks do not resonate with the surrounding culture in the same way as the other three do. And that’s because the Christian Faith at its heart is deeply counter-cultural. The Good News proclaims that the God who made us and loves us, calls us back into relationship with Him, because, we have rebelled against Him and have sought to live without Him. We have abandoned our image-bearing vocation to be God’s representatives and live under His authority. The world’s culture does not recognise God or His authority or His call on our lives. Instead it seeks to live separated from its Creator, in a broken world as the result of that broken relationship. So Jesus we read in Mark 1:14 comes into Galilee ‘proclaiming the good news of God’ – and his first recorded words? ‘The time has come, the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news.’

The Good news that Jesus is the true King and we need to turn-away from a life lived without Him to a life which acknowledges our need of forgiveness and his kingship.

That’s a challenging message for our culture to hear today – not least when people might look to the many good things that they is often committed to- and where they find Christians alongside them.

Now my strong sense in all this is that for almost all of us, we find ourselves constantly under pressure (both internal and external) to shift

our emphasis away from those first two marks (and of course they are related, because if we are not proclaiming the good news, then people won't hear and therefore they won't respond and so there will not be the people to teach, baptise and nurture), and concentrate on the latter three. We are blessed at St John's with a large church family where a lot of teaching and nurturing goes on, so in some ways we are for now protected from the wider picture of the Church, where congregations are small and often struggling; and where if we're honest it's harder and harder to commit to telling and teaching, so the focus has shifted to the other 3, and the church does not grow. But although we are large, we face the same challenge, because the telling part of our calling is just as hard for us, and we too are pushed toward the latter 3 marks of mission at the expense of the first two- and crucially- at the expense of the growth of the Kingdom. We need to keep proclaiming the Good News; we need to keep telling people about God's loving plan for the whole of creation, including them. We need to keep being God's representatives, and vehicles of His Grace and Mercy. We want, don't we, to see our family and our friends, our neighbours and our colleagues come to know the forgiving, transforming love of Jesus.

Which brings us to our Bridge Building ministries, and hopefully you have read about them in the reports and might have benefited from or contributed to them over the last 12 months. Community Café; Resource Days; Warm Room; Wellbeing courses; Friday Night Dinner; Language courses – all wonderful caring, serving enterprises in and of themselves; but; if they are not a bridge into peoples lives that enables them to cross into to community of faith and find life in Jesus, then at the end of the day, they could be run by any secular organisation.

As God has helped us navigate our way through the Coronavirus pandemic; as we have gathered again with fresh impetus; and as we have extended our outreach into our community by way of our Bridge – building ministries, along of course with many other established ministries (Youth; Cameo, Recovery, Toddlers; Holiday Club), we need to be manifesting all those 5 marks of mission, not least the proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom, so that we can win girls and boys women and men for Jesus, nurture a new generation of those who own His name and share His saving love with a beautiful but broken world.

And it's with this in mind that I've asked Jon and Jo to share with us some aspects of our recent Bridge-Building ministries.

We have so much to thank God for, in His love and gracious provision for our needs, and for the calling on our lives. So as the coming year unfolds let's commit ourselves afresh, both personally and corporately, to be those bridges over which people can cross from darkness to light and into the freedom that God has for us all.

Associate Vicar's Address – Jon Tattersall

Bridge-building & Blessing

As we continue to look at all the things we have to be thankful to God for in the past year, and all the things we are looking forward to in this coming year, it's important to note the ways in which we seek to be a blessing to both our church community and the wider church family, but also to think further afield and our call to be a people with a heart for our city – and so it's important that we turn our attention to our bridge-building ministries. In just a moment, I'll provide an update on these bridge-building initiatives in the area of Wellbeing and Creative Arts, and Jo will bring some updates in Hospitality and Social Justice and Transformation.

Before we do that though, it is important to underline how important these acts of Bridge-building are in our call to love and reach out to those around us. I am constantly struck by the stories of so many people I meet, away from St John's, who have either been a part of this church in the past, or know someone who has been blessed by this place. And what stands out to me is that this is a place that often gives away of itself, even to great personal cost – financially, practically, and particularly in terms of people – people who have been a part of the church community for a season or maybe even a few seasons, who are then released, maybe commissioned, or simply just blessed as they then move onto what the Lord has for them next.

It shouldn't come as a surprise then that, as we seek to follow Jesus, that this is where we find ourselves led. The very act of Jesus coming into this world was one of building a bridge between heaven and earth. He came to us, when we could not find our way to home to him.

In our vision & values document – one of our 12 core values here at St John's – is generosity. These values are the kind of ideas and attitudes we feel are essential – the things we value about St John's that we feel are important to us. And under those values it says this – “We value generosity. We are committed to freely give away all that we have freely received from God.” I love that – and I cannot think of a more important time in our culture and society for us to really press and lean into this value. This, ultimately, is the heart of our bridge-building ministries – to give the mercy, grace and love of Jesus away that we have freely received – so that others may know that mercy, grace and love for themselves, in the person of Jesus.

Wellbeing

So what of bridge-building itself? In terms of wellbeing then, the three key recommendations put forward to start with were staff support and care at 'The Field House care home', hosting a 'Mental Health First Aid course', and looking at starting 'fitness clubs' at the church. The staff self-care sessions at The Field House have been happening with Catriona Foster and Liz Bryson's input. They have been encouraged by the relationships that they are building with the staff there, and by the number of staff who have attended the Drop-In sessions. A potential area of growth in this bridge-building endeavour is, as we take a pause for a short season, to learn from and review the impact of these sessions, to consider how this might be taken further into other community spaces and places like other care homes, schools, local shops and so on. This of course is highly dependant on volunteers, but it is a potential area of future bridge-building ministry and a way we can share Jesus to our wider community.

I am pleased to say that we have now hosted our first Mental Health first Aid course here at St John's. This has taken some time to bring together, not least finding a suitable trainer to work with. This has been resolved and 5 members of our staff took part in a 2 day MHFA course, joining with other churches and community organisations at a course hosted here last month. The plan is that we will then seek to build upon these initiatives by continuing to host training of differing levels and time requirements, suitable for other volunteers to whom it might be useful – both within the church and further afield. This could include for

instance more members of our youth and children's team, our welcome team, other pastoral staff and key volunteers. The aim with this is, in time, to become a trusted venue for training, facilitating our community in a vital learning process about a critical issue, and helping those in crisis find help.

Fitness clubs are yet to be established - though this does continue to be a source of interest to many people. This is more a case of finding the right person and the right opportunity to present itself, so please be praying that we might further explore how we might use fitness opportunities such as keep fit/pilates/running clubs etc to build bridges into our community. I should also note that whilst not strictly within the realms of these suggested projects, conversations are taking place to reimagine and revision an outreach ministry to men that is both inward and outward looking, and may find some significant overlap with the theme of wellbeing. Our early conversations have revealed a desire that 'everyman' might feel able to be included and brought into a Christ-centered community, and 'everyman' would be reached for Christ.

Creative Arts

In terms of creative arts, we are still exploring ways in which we might develop a community choir for the wider benefit of Harborne and as a means of building bridges in this area. This is probably a case of waiting for the right person to come along at the right time and with the right vision - so please be praying!

Arts and Crafts groups, a Community Art Exhibition and an Arts and Crafts Cafe were also suggested as having areas of interest and potential - at present this has been restricted slightly by the lack of space available to us whilst we wait for our flooring issue to be resolved. It has also been restricted in the sense that need to find the right person to help organise and oversee these kinds of events - a place where art might be used to express the gospel message in innovative and thought-provoking ways. Please do be praying into this, and having a chat with anyone you think might be right for this sort of project! We remain committed, where possible, to using the building for these types of events, depending on space and requirements. Please be praying for wisdom and discernment

for the facilities and room booking team - they are often trying to juggle a LOT of different users and requests at once, and it is not possible for them to say yes to everything.

I'll hand over to Jo Jennings now to talk us through Hospitality and Social Justice and Transformation.

Curate's Address – Jo Jennings

Imagine in your mind for a moment a bridge, picture a bridge, any bridge, what do you notice? Its structure? Its length? Its shape? All of those things are important but perhaps the most important thing is that a bridge always goes somewhere, it's a two way movement, it connects two places together. And that is what our bridge building ministries seek to do. We bridge out into the community, connecting, helping and demonstrating loving service but we also seek to draw the community into our Christ centred community here at St Johns.

Our bridge building ministries are not just things we do to make this community a better place but it is an opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus on the ground and to proclaim the good news, the light and the hope of Jesus which, of course, we remember is one of our primary callings as disciples of Christ.

Luke 4: 16-21 tells us that Jesus; ministry was to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. If we are to follow the servant hearted leadership of Jesus then we are required to do the very same.

Two thousand years ago Jesus came into a world of poverty, oppression, injustice and war. It was a world where hope seemed in desperately short supply, a world that was not much different to ours today. Our world, our community desperately needs hope and transformation. The initiation of our bridge building ministries seeks to bring that hope and transformation, and as we look back over the last year I want to update you on some of the things that have been happening in our hospitality and social justice and transformation bridge building ministries.

This time last year, none of the following ministries that I will speak about existed. When I arrived in the summer of 2022 there was much conversation flowing and ideas being thought out but nothing was up, running and off the ground. Now ten months later we have a community café, Friday night dinner, ESL lessons for Ukrainians living in the area and our warm space ran for 3 months over the coldest months of the year.

We should rightly acknowledge what an achievement this is, however we also acknowledge that along the way there have been frustrations, times when things haven't gone as planned and fears that perhaps we weren't on the right lines. However, I believe that the launch of these new bridge building initiatives is evidence of God's grace and how when we partner with him we see the fruits of His vision for His community here in Harborne.

The community café and Friday night dinner are excellent examples of hospitality in our community. Both ministries seek to reach people who need a warm space, a hot meal or a drink, who are perhaps lonely and need company and companionship. Both of these initiatives have seen growth since their conception. Friday night dinner is now feeding around 60 people every other Friday in partnership with the Junk Food Project. I attended with my family on Good Friday and was delighted to see so many people enjoying wonderful food and great fellowship. The atmosphere was one of love and acceptance and it was a joy to see some people stay on and attend our Behold service that night. The addition of being able to buy takeaway containers so that excess food can be boxed up and delivered to those in need is a great example of what our hospitality looks like beyond the front doors of our church.

The community café is also slowly growing and we have been able to signpost people to other ministries such as the debt advice service, celebrate recovery and the healing prayer centre. The café community is made up of both church family and those who would not consider themselves part of our congregation. We have seen an increased uptake in the offer of being prayed for and are slowly beginning to establish relationships with people. None of this would have happened without our doors being open to receive those who are most in need.

In terms of social justice and transformation bridge builders, we ran a warm space from January to mid-April. Every time I popped in I was blown

away by not only the literal warm room but the warm welcome that people and families received. To us the concept might sound too simple, a warm space with books, games, jigsaws, art and craft and hot drinks and toast, but to those who have visited it has literally been a lifeline and again sign posting to other ministries has taken place.

On Monday afternoons number of Ukrainian women attend here for English lessons. This is a humbling ministry as stories are told from women who have left their husbands to fight in the war. But for them this restores their dignity and sense of worth as they seek to find a way to live well in a foreign country. Amazing answers to prayer have happened with this ministry not least being able to recruit another English teacher at such short notice.

In each of these ministries we have seen people come back over the bridge into our midweek and Sunday services, our toddler and baby groups and the special services we put together for Easter. We thank God for his grace, his presence and his hand on all these things.

And as a leadership team we want to thank all those who have given up their time and energy to support these initiatives on the ground, without you these things would simply not happen. We are seeing blessings from all of these ministries, but what's next, is the question I would like to pose!

We want to see more and more connection to our community, the potential in the 'what next?' question is wide. Our primary thoughts should turn to how we can further and develop these new ministries and look at what else we can offer as a Church. But in all this we want to continue to work with God's vision for his community, to press in and hear from Him.

And so, as I finish I want to ask you to continue to pray for all of these ministries as we head into a new church year. We long to see people empowered and equipped to live well here in Harborne and the surrounding area, to be transformed by the love of Jesus, to seek a relationship with him, and that the light of Christ would shine like a beacon in this place to our community.