



bring Jesus

Making sense of mission

by Rev Dr Steen Olsen



Steen also blogs at LCA eNews. To sign up to his newslist go to www.lca.org.au/enews, insert your email address and tick the box next to 'bring Jesus'. He would also love to hear your thoughts and stories about mission in your context.

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It doesn't depend on you

'What text in the Bible first comes to mind when you think of evangelism?' It is a question that I like to ask congregations and other groups.

Invariably the answer is the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19,20), where Jesus says, 'Go! Make disciples! Baptise! Teach! ... and I will always be with you'.

While this is a great word from our Lord that is important for our understanding of mission, I am no longer sure that it is the best place to start when we talk about bringing Jesus to people.

It seems that when most of us hear this text our thoughts immediately go to what we have to do. Mostly we don't feel that we are doing very well and so we feel guilty.

Worse, for many of us Aussie and Kiwi Lutherans, it puts witnessing firmly into the Too Hard basket. We tend to hear the Great Commission as law and it leaves us feeling condemned. The law brings no power for change, so we just feel guilty—and guilt never helped with anything except repentance. In our day it is not even a good motivator. We just feel guilty.

It is not the fault of what Jesus said, but that we have become so used to hearing Matthew 28:19,20 in a particular way. Even our name for this text 'the Great Commission' places the focus

squarely on what we do, not on what God does.

At times it has also led to rather over-confident assertions. People have declared that we will fulfil this command 'in our lifetime' or even 'in this decade', as though that were within our power and ability. Once again, the emphasis is on us and what we do—or, in many cases, don't do.

Moreover, it doesn't sound like something that someone like me would want to do. Or something I would be good at. I had better keep my mouth shut because it is likely I will get it wrong. It is all too scary! Better leave it to the paid professionals.

So, is there a better place to start? What else does Jesus say?

What if we started towards the end of John's gospel? Consider the following words of Jesus to his first disciples: 'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven' (John 20:21–23).

In Luke 10, when Jesus sends the 70 to visit the places where he himself intended to go, he encourages us to 'pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers out into **his** harvest'. This is the Lord's harvest. We are not in charge. The Holy Spirit is the director of the mission. In John 14, Jesus says, 'The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in



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my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you ...’

The Father sent his son Jesus into the world; Father and Son sent the Spirit; Father, Son and Holy Spirit send us to join them. We become part of God’s mission to his world. We are therefore called to join Jesus in what he is doing, not to go out and work for God.

Somehow that doesn’t seem so difficult or scary. We can be at peace, just as Jesus promised. God is at work in the lives of people and he graciously invites us to be part of what he is doing. That doesn’t feel like being pushed in the deep end and told to sink or swim.

The LCA’s new Board for Local Mission is working to help grow the missional culture in the LCA. We are not looking to produce another program; we have had lots of those—good ones—but this goes much deeper. It is about growing our sense of who we are as the people

of God who participate in God’s mission to his world.

It is not so much about inviting people to programs at church or talking with strangers whom we never expect to meet again. It is more about living our lives together with our family, workmates, neighbours and friends. The 70 were sent out to receive hospitality, to enter the turf of others and to share life with them there.

We are called to be friends with those who are not yet Christians. It is a normal, natural thing, not a set of steps we are trying to take them through. And, when the time is right, and the Spirit gives us the opportunity, we share something of God’s story and how it impacts our lives. Next month we will dig a bit more deeply into that.

Steen Olsen serves as the SA/NT Director for Mission and as a member of the LCA Board for Local Mission.



As a church where love comes to life we develop strategies that clearly and effectively communicate a growing missional culture in the LCA which excites and energises people.

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