

One God, One Mission

Series: **On a Mission From God**

Location: St George's Battery Point

Date: 12 January 2025

Texts: Psalm 96; 1 Peter 2.4-12 ;Matthew 28:16-20

When I was a student at Sydney University one day I walked out of an ecumenical prayer meeting only to be met by two passing girls who screamed in my face, "Get your rosaries off our ovaries!!" I thought it was a good line, although ironic since I wasn't Catholic. But it was a confronting moment.

Today we're starting a new series called On a Mission from God. Unlike the 1980 classic film, *The Blues Brothers*, this mission is not to get the band back together so we can stop an orphanage closing, rather, it's how God calls us as his people to share in his mission to the world. Starting the year with a sermon series on mission is always a good idea, but this year the Anglican church around Australia has a special focus on mission with the Hope 25 campaign. Hope 25 aims to have every Anglican church in Australia focussed on sharing the Hope we have in Jesus with our neighbours between Easter and Pentecost this year. So we're starting the year with this series to help prepare us for Hope 25.

This morning I wanted to focus on what God's mission is and why God is on mission and then how God calls us to join him in his mission, and we'll spend the rest of series looking at the various ways we can play our part in God's mission. We'll look at two points: One God and One Mission.

I began this sermon with that story, because those girls at uni raised one of the great questions or you might say objections to the idea that the church has a mission - namely, isn't it arrogant and intolerant, even harmful, to say your religion is right and to try and convert others to it? Maybe this is something you've wondered yourself, as you've been exploring faith. Or maybe it's one of the reasons you've not shared your faith with your children or your friends, even though you've been going to church for many years. It's a serious question that I want to address this morning. But to get there I want to take something of an indirect route and begin by looking at our Old Testament reading, Psalm 96.

Psalm 96 is a song that invites God's people to sing his praise and declare his glory.

- 1 Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.

God's people in the OT were Israel and they are now, this side of Jesus, God's people are the Church. But the Psalm doesn't stop there, v 7:

- Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

All the nations too are invited to join in praising God.

Not only the nations, the song calls all creation to worship God. So, verse 9:

Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth.

Why is it that all things are called to worship and praise God?

Because the LORD alone, he is God. There is no other

4 For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.

5 For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.

One God

Fundamental tenet of Scripture – there is one God.

The Shema, is an ancient prayer recited twice daily by Jews for thousands of years, and it's taken directly from Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. **5** Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

The LORD – OT personal name for God.

Paul reworks this in light of the Lordship of Jesus:

1 Corinthians 8.4-6

we know that 'An idol is nothing at all in the world' and that 'There is no God but one.'

5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), **6** yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

You see Paul picking up these OT ideas. The Hebrew word for idols (*elilim*) basically means *nothingness/worthlessness*, and that is what the apostle says idols are – nothings. But instead it was God the Father, through Christ who created all things and through whom we live and for whom we live.

This is the fundamental teaching of the Bible about God, and about us as creatures.

There is one God, who has made all things. And we live according to the law of our being when we worship him. Or in the words of Deuteronomy, when we respond to his gift of life by loving him with all our heart and soul and strength.

One God – so all things are created for him – to worship him.

Westminster Catechism:

The chief end of man [sic] is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

But not all know and worship the one true and living God. And this brings us to point 2.

- **One Mission**

God's will is that he be known and worshipped.

Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
2 Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
3 Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvellous deeds among all peoples.

Here we see how the one true God has made himself known – through his “salvation” and his “marvellous deeds”, and then, we might add, the record of these in his word.

In the Old Testament, the great moment of God's salvation, where he performed his marvellous deeds, was the Exodus; where God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt through the prophet Moses, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. He was with them all through their journey in the wilderness through the pillar of fire and cloud. He spoke to them through the prophet Moses.

In the New Testament, God's mission to make himself known and to bring all things into fellowship with himself climaxes in the coming of Christ, the eternal Son of the Father, come in the flesh, even as we've just celebrated at Christmas. It's in Jesus that we see God's salvation writ large as he hangs on the cross bearing the sins of the world. His marvellous deeds are seen in his bursting the gates of death asunder and his glorious ascension to reign at the right hand of the Father.

We read the record of God's salvation and his marvellous deeds in the pages of Holy Scripture, God's word to us.

And he has done all this so that all people might know his love and love him, honour him, serve him - in short worship him in return.

The writers of the New Testament speak of it like this:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.¹

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.²

As human beings we are by nature creatures who worship. We can worship the *elilim*, the nothings, or we can worship the true and living God who made us, who loves us, who has sent his Son to die for us so that we might be reconciled to him and know him as our Father, and ourselves as his dearly loved children, and so find life in his name.

¹ John 3:16-17

² Romans 5.8

If this is God's mission - to send his Son that through him the world might be reconciled to himself and join in his praise - then this is the mission that God invites us as his people to join in. The word mission comes from the Latin word of *send*, and in John's Gospel, Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Or again, Jesus puts it like this at the end of the Gospel of Matthew:

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'³

This is the mission of the Church - to go and make disciples of all nations. Disciples who are Baptised, with all that signifies of the washing clean from sin through Jesus' blood, to being united to Christ and his body, and through Christ becoming a child of God. And who are taught all the Christ has commanded so that we may do the good he has prepared for us to do and live for the praise of his glory.

This is the mission he calls us as members of his body to share in, that we'll be hearing about over the coming weeks.

But what about that objection, that to proclaim Christ as *the* Way, the Truth and the Life, that no one comes to the Father except through him, that to say such a thing is arrogant and intolerant and to call people to receive Christ as Saviour and submit to him as Lord is harmful. What can we say to this?

The default assumption that many people in our culture have is that all religions are just different paths to the one source. And if that is the case then surely it's arrogant and intolerant to say that Jesus is the only way to God. A few thoughts.

The first problem with this assumption is that while it tries to affirm all religions, it actually doesn't pay much attention to any of them. Even a quick look at the different religions will see they teach very different things which contradict each other. Hinduism teaching the existence of many gods, each reflecting some aspect of ultimate reality (Brahman). Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith said there was only one God. And Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) rejected belief in God altogether, which is the position held by Theravada Buddhism. Christians believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Jewish Messiah who died and rose again. This is a non negotiable central claim of the Christian faith. Jews say that Jesus was only a pretend Messiah, the true Messiah is still to come. And the Koran explicitly says that Jesus did not die on the cross, nor was he the Son of God.

To say that these mutually exclusive claims are in reality saying really the same thing is in fact to claim that you can see more than everyone in each of the religions. That you alone have the superior comprehensive knowledge of spiritual reality that you deny any of the religions have. It starts to sound more like a patronising white western position of arrogance, rather than a stance of humility. Might not a more humble position be to say, if Jesus said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father but through me,"⁴ then who am I not to share my masters words?

³ Matthew 28:18-20

⁴ John 14.6

But behind our uneasiness with the exclusive claims of the Christian faith I think lies a desire to affirm a common humanity. To say that there is something deeply true about all humanity. To say that we are all equally loved by God and we may all in the end return to him. Looked at from this perspective, the exclusive claims of the good news of Jesus - that there is one God, who made and who loves us, who has sent his beloved Son so that through him we might be reconciled to God and become his children, that through him we might share in the very relationship of the eternal Son with the Father. To say that such a claim is arrogant and intolerant, and that we should just stay quiet about this seems to me to ask the question, "Is being a child of God good for some and not for others?" But we do share a common humanity. And what is good for me is also good for my neighbour. God has made us for relationship with him. It is a relationship of love and praise where we find our true humanity.

Seen from this perspective, what we've been talking about today; that there is only one God who has revealed himself through Jesus Christ, and that only through Christ can we know him, turns out to be the deepest statement of the basic Dignity and Destiny for all human beings. That we are made by God and for God. That we all can come to the Father through the Son. This is not so much a doctrinal statement, as a living relationship, the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the hope for the world, the hope for our friends and neighbours. The hope for you and me. Jesus is God's mission. That through him we might be reconciled to God as our Father and come before him in worship. God calls us to share in his mission and make Christ known. We'll spend the coming weeks looking at the different ways each of us can join in God's mission. Then, and even today, we may join with sea and all that is in it, with the creatures of the field and the trees of the forest, with all the families of nations and rejoice and sing praise to our maker and saviour and judge.