

The Faithzone : MISSION

This PDF version contains all the material relating to this section of the Video formatted for easy printing and comprising:

- Summary
- Transcript
- All questions/activities listed together
- Each question/activity listed on a separate page with pointers for discussion
- A collective worship

Summary

Presenter: Jemima Presadum, Christian Missionary, Birmingham, UK

Jesus's command to spread the good news.

The gospel through words and actions: the influence of mission.

A 19th century example from South India.

Missionaries – a mixed blessing?

Mission Partners: mission reborn in the 20th century.

The gospel in multi-faith Britain.

Mission as dialogue.

Discussion

How do you think Christians can most effectively spread the Gospel in the 21st century?

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Transcript

My name is Jemima Presadam. I now live and work in Birmingham, but before coming to Britain I used to live in South India. It's a part of the world that is mainly Hindu, but my family was different. A hundred and twenty years ago, British missionaries so impressed my grandfather with their love and care that he became a Christian and my family remained Christian ever since.

Those missionaries were following the command of Jesus to spread the good news, something that Christians have done through their words and actions for the past two thousand years.

But the commitment that led to my family's conversion is a recent story and one that is represented by this collecting box, used by Victorians to raise money at home for missionary work abroad. During the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the idea of spreading the gospel right round the globe caught people's imagination and many missionaries, financed through collecting boxes like this, packed their bags and set sail to the Americas, to Africa and to Asia.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Christians from Britain, Europe and America had reached just about every country in the world. But their arrival was often a mixed blessing. Many missionaries may have known their Bible, but few understood the people they went to convert. Most had little respect for the culture of the land and no knowledge of other religions. What's more, their work was often underpinned by colonial power, like the Raj in the case of India.

It was far from being all bad though. At their best, missionaries transformed communities, creating the Church and bringing education and healthcare, particularly for the poorest, positive effects that you can clearly see today.

A hundred years after the year that this box represents, something new is happening. Today's missionaries are called Mission Partners. And they aren't just sent from Britain – they are invited to Britain. I myself work as a mission partner within British churches and with the Church Mission Society. Now I am a parish priest in Birmingham. Here I have a congregation of African, Caribbean and White, one that lives with Hindu, Sikh and Muslim neighbours.

Like the missionaries of the past, we live the gospel through our actions, based on Jesus' gift of fullness of life for everyone. But learning, from their mistakes, we try to positively identify with people and through a whole range of activities to build relationships between all the different faiths in the area.

Mission used to be a monologue but I believe it can now be a dialogue – a two-way conversation leading not just to deeper friendship but also to mutual understanding and trust.

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Activities

COMMUNICATION

1. How do we communicate?
2. How do we cross frontiers?

CHANGE

3. How did Jesus want to change the society in which he lived?
4. Monologue or dialogue - what's the difference?
5. Command or serve – what's the historical record?

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Activity 1

How do we communicate?

Communication, of course, involves far more than spoken or written language. Gesture, scent, colour, movement, touch, sound ... any reflection on how we communicate must involve thought about these additions/alternatives to using words.

- Ask groups of students to explore the various ways in which emotions can be symbolized – fear, forgiveness, anger, happiness, for example. How can these emotions be expressed in sound, gesture, colour, movement. (It is sometimes helpful to think about how animals express these feelings.) Develop the ideas into a form of ‘Emotional Charades’. Can the various groups interpret each others’ ‘meaning’?
- Words make things easier in some ways, but words can be slippery things too. Extend and focus the previous activity by asking groups/individuals to brainstorm (or use a thesaurus) to generate synonyms for their key emotion. For example, ‘fear’ can suggest timidity, anxiety, terror, suspicion... Then create a collage using these various words. As written words are physical things, students will have to design a suitable ‘typography’ for their words, which will reflect their meaning.

Extension

Discuss the different senses and the sort of information that they give us. If one sense is not working properly, what limitations will that impose on the individual and how might s/he compensate for that? In the case of e.g. sight or hearing, think in particular about what the person with full sensory perception might do to make themselves clearer.

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Activity 2

How do we cross frontiers?

Any kind of ‘mission’ involves crossing frontiers. These frontiers are not just geographical – they may be social, cultural, racial or political. The following activities may help students reflect on this aspect of communication.

- What journeys have the students made to ‘strange’ or ‘foreign’ places? Talk and write about these places. What was different for strange about the place that they visited? Did they learn anything from their journey? Did the journey change them? How did their perception of the ‘home’ society change on their return?
- The recent film *Lord of the Rings* has renewed interest in Tolkein’s book of the same name. One of the most engaging aspects of Tolkein’s work was his creation of a coherent fantasy world, with its own geography, culture and languages. Rather than beginning with a narrative, younger pupils might like to create their own world with at least two separate societies. As well as creating their world’s geography, encourage them to create distinct societies each with, as in Tolkein, its own script. Once the world has been created, they can write a Tolkeinesque narrative about travelling through their world. Some examples of scripts which might inspire pupils can be found at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Pantheon/6077/alefbet.htm>
- The theme of ‘communication’ inevitably suggests drama. Scenarios can be created based on this theme – particularly the problems. Young pupils might enjoy creating scenarios based on ET-style meetings between earthlings and visitors from outer space. Other scenarios might include how to communicate in a country where you don’t have the language, or involve attempts to brake out of isolation. – prisoners in cells trying to escape from their solitude.
- Christian missionaries have always faced the problem of how to translate the Christian message into the language of the society they are working in. This is not simply a linguistic problem. Missionaries to Anglo-Saxon England portrayed Christ as a warrior figure battling against dark forces, in an attempt to communicate with their warlord-aristocratic hosts. The Rothwell Cross is a good visual example of this process of cultural translation. There is a fascinating site about the Rothwell Cross at <http://flsouthern.edu/eng/abruce/rood/home.htm> This site also includes the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood* in runes – as on the cross – which might be useful for the first activity above.

The Church Missionary Society website provides extensive material based on the idea of designing a cross for different cultures in the world. This material can be found at <http://www.cms-uk.org/resources2.htm> and then using the ‘A-cross the World’ download. It might also be worth designing a cross for different groups *within* our *own* society. The modern church has always had problems communicating with ‘youth’ – perhaps students can come up with some better ideas?

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Activity 2

Extension

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Activity 3

How did Jesus want to change the society in which he lived?

Jesus' words and actions were all focused on pointing to and initiating the Kingdom of God. Bringing the Kingdom of God into being includes, but goes beyond ideas of personal salvation. Is it possible to envisage this ultimate Kingdom? Probably not, though some of the best attempts to depict a place of complete harmony have come from the hands of 'naïve' artists.

- Students could design their own 'Kingdom of God' images. John Muafangejo's woodcut of Noah's Ark might provide a model which pupils could use. It comes from the Island Gallery (Oxford) site at <http://www.islandgallery.co.uk/pics/muaf137b.jpg>
If you want to find out more about this wonderful artists, then try the John Muafengejo trust at <http://www.johnmuafangejo.com> which has more examples of his work.

Extension

Many groups have tried to realize their vision of the Kingdom of God on earth – ready for the New Millennium/second coming. They saw Jesus as challenging established values and wanted to reflect this in their everyday life. Often – even almost inevitably - this involved going against the everyday norms of their time. Examples include Gerard Winstanley and the Diggers 17th century England and Thomas Muntzer who led the 1525 Peasants revolt in Germany. The most enduring community of this kind are the Hutterites and, less radically, the Amish/Mennonites and other Anabaptist ('without baptism') traditions. Count Zinzenndorf and the early Moravians could also be seen in this light.

Try to find out more about these groups and what they believe. If you were to found a millennial community, what would its basic beliefs and values be?

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Activity 4

Monologue or dialogue – what's the difference?

A monologue is a voice talking at you; a dialogue is a conversation. Of course, dialogue does not preclude persuasion (argument!) and change. In many ways we live in a society in which, more than in any previous society, people are surrounded by voices telling them what to do – namely adverts. These can be seen as an insidious form of monologue. Sometimes it feels as if there is not much we can do about this, short of defacing the billboards or boycotting commercial television.

- The church feels a need to advertise too. Students could devise their own 'Go to Church!!!' Ad campaign. One of the most successful recent models involved paralleling Jesus with Che Guevara. Some accused this campaign of blasphemy – see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/uk/newsid_250000/250752.stm

Extension

Follow up the above exercise by a discussion of the limitations to such a form. Adverts might sell consumer goods, but how many people have ever been converted by such an advertising campaign alone. What are the sorts of things that are most persuasive and effective in changing people's lives or causing them to have commitment to something?

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Activity 5

Command or serve – what's the historical record?

One of the most striking features of the film is the way Jemima Presadum, an Asian woman minister, calls into question assumptions about the church as a white, patriarchal institution. However, the film also suggests that things were different in the past.

- Does the church need to be apologetic for what happened in the past? Is it appropriate to judge behaviour in earlier periods by contemporary standards? Does the evidence support the negative assumptions that are given here? Older students could debate these issues with reference to the behaviour and attitudes of 19th century missionaries. It would be best to focus on a single area.

China makes an interesting case study. Christian missionaries were accused of arrogance and were tortured and murdered during the Boxer Rebellion. Does this justify a negative assessment of 19th century Christian missions? Using a search engine, students could research information on the causes and course of the Boxer Rebellion, noting evidence that would support the claim that missionaries were often culturally arrogant. There is an interesting article on this subject at the Christianity Today website at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/52h/52h031.html>

On the other hand, evidence of selfless devotion and respect for indigenous culture could be found, using a search engine, by browsing for material on Hudson Taylor/China Inland Mission, Gladys Aylward, Minnie Vautrin and Charles T. Studd, to name but a few.

What is the general verdict of the evidence – arrogance or service?

Extension

The work of the Salvation Army is founded on convictions held by its founder, William Booth, who lived at the height of a time of missionary work into 'darkest Africa'. He did not hesitate to talk about 'darkest England', referring to the enormous levels of poverty and ignorance that limited and blighted people's lives in our own country. Find out more about the Salvation Army today. Their reputation for social work is second to none, but there is no hiding their motivation, to bring people to know Jesus. In today's largely secular society, what role can religious organizations play in meeting social need?

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Collective Worship - YOUR MISSION

Four students move forward to begin...

SPEAKER 1: This morning we are going to see a short video about healing.

SPEAKER 2: Then we will ask some questions about it afterwards to find out what you think about what's said in the video.

Show the video, which lasts about 4 minutes, then play the music as the four students begin addressing the students.

SPEAKER 3: Jemima Presadum ended that video by saying; "*Mission used to be a monologue but I believe it can now be a dialogue – a two-way conversation leading not just to deeper friendship but also to mutual understanding and trust.*" Did you get the feeling that is really important to her?

SPEAKER 4: It must be important to her because she's travelled all the way from India to Birmingham to share her ideas with the people she now lives with.

And it can't have been easy for her – she's probably faced many difficulties in her life but she's dealt with those challenges because her mission is to spread the ideas she believes will make the world a better place.

SPEAKER 1: What is your mission? What do you want to achieve while you're here on earth?

SPEAKER 2: There is an ancient Hindu word – *Dharma*. It's not easy to translate it into English but some people say it means something like 'your reason for being here'. For example, you might say – "What is your dharma?"

SPEAKER 3: And I might answer; "My reason for doing everything I do in my life is to help Manchester United win the European Cup every year from now on. (*Alter this to a local team – or your school netball team, or whatever.*)

SPEAKER 4: Of course not everybody fulfils their dharma but it's a good idea to keep asking yourself that important question... what is your mission in life? What is your reason for being here?

SPEAKER 1: Let's face it - until you find out what you want to achieve it's hard to figure out how to make it happen. So that's the order of events... ask what you want to make of your life and then set about achieving your goals.

SPEAKER 2: If you do that it's much easier to score the goal you're hoping for. Otherwise you could wander around not really knowing what's important to you and before you know it – you'll have missed the opportunity to make it happen.

SPEAKER 3: And how will you feel if you waste your time chasing stupid goals?

SPEAKER 4: How would you feel if – in ten years time - these comments are being made about you? "S/he's got about as many brains as a turkey."

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(These comments can be altered in anyway you prefer to suit your school and locality – all boys school, all girls school, mixed culture school, etc.)

SPEAKER 1: “He was really clever when he was at school and then suddenly he gave up caring about anything and just became a drifter.”

SPEAKER 2: Listen to the comments carefully and close your eyes if it helps you concentrate more easily. Really try to understand how you would feel if someone said this about you.

After each statement the speakers wait for 10 seconds.

SPEAKER 3: “S/he was the best team captain we ever had. Really good”

SPEAKER 4: “S/he wanted to become the first astronaut to land on Mars and against all odds s/he made it.”

SPEAKER 1: S/he’s lazy. S/he’s wasted every opportunity s/he’s been given.

SPEAKER 2: How would you feel if somebody said that about you?

SPEAKER 3: “His/her problem is that s/he’s got no confidence. Thinks s/he’s rubbish. Such a waste.”

SPEAKER 4: S/he’s nice to be with. “Before I got to know her/him I thought s/he was really stuck-up. But now I’ve realised s/he’s a really genuine person who cares about other people.”

SPEAKER 1: “The problem with him/her is s/he’s totally selfish. No wonder s/he hasn’t got any friends now.”

SPEAKER 2; “You’ve got to give it to him/her. S/he made a decision and s/he stuck to it.” What’s your mission?

SPEAKER 3: “Manchester United would’ve still been in the European Cup if he’d got his act together.”

SPEAKER 4: I’d trust him/her with my life.

SPEAKER 1: Do you know what your mission is?

SPEAKER 2: Do you know how you’re going to achieve your ambition?

SPEAKER 1: And who you can trust to help you?

SPEAKER 3: Is this a good time to start thinking about it?

SPEAKER 4: Think about it.