

CHAPTER 9: THE CHURCH REACHES OUT

9.1 OUR MISSION

9.1.1 – To be an ‘apostle’ is to be one ‘who is sent.’ As Christians, we are sent out into the world to bear witness to Christ.

9.1.2 – Do you believe in evangelism? Are words important in how we express our faith? How is evangelism most effectively done in our time and place? Who needs evangelism? We thought indigenous people did, and look what it did.

9.1.2 – Is service a form of evangelism too, and sometimes even a more effective one than words? Should we separate talking to people about what we believe and serving them? Should we limit the word evangelism for talk and limit service to deeds?

9.2 OUR MISSION AND OTHER FAITHS

9.2.1 – This section wants to do two things: 1) truly honour those who have faith but not the Christian faith, and 2) find a way to tell others about Christ that honours them rather than makes them feel inferior or deficient. Is this possible?

9.2.2 – Once again evangelism as something we are called to do. We should be able to tell others what we believe and why we believe it. But we should also earn the privilege of telling them because they ask us and because they respect who we are. But should we not be ready to listen and receive from others just as much as we would like to share what we have to offer? Have we pre-judged that we have the greater truth before we even begin the conversation and listening? Does Christ as “the way, the truth and the life” have to be interpreted as excluding other ways?

9.3 OUR MISSION AND UNBELIEF

9.3.1 – There are atheists who do not believe in God, and agnostics who aren’t sure what they believe about God. Some just don’t feel God in their hearts.

9.3.2 – Some do not believe because they can’t believe in a loving God in a world of suffering and loss. But this also presumes a belief in a God who has the power to make everything right. What about human choice and the freedom of nature in its rhythms, patterns and cataclysms? What about the accidents of life with physical and mental limitations? Is there a way to believe in a God who is not in control of what happens but has the power to bring life out of death and new life beyond suffering?

9.3.3 – Here we get a picture of a God who is vulnerable, who suffers for and with us. Some think this is a weak God and a powerless one. Others believe such a God is powerful as love, and love suffers and is vulnerable if it is real love. Does this section do justice to how suffering love is also, paradoxically, powerful to save and resurrect new life? Love suffers because there is injustice and pain in the world. But by ‘being-with’

and 'suffering-with' others, doors to healing and new life can emerge. What do you think?

9.3.4 – The bible gives us ample testimony of people of faith who struggle, suffer and die unfairly. And yet, God is active in bringing new life in the midst of it all. What would it mean to pray to such a God through our own troubles and fears?

CHAPTER 10: OUR HOPE IN GOD

10.1 – Our hope is two-fold: 1) 'for a renewed world' and 2) 'for fullness of life in the age to come.' What meaning do these statements have for you?

10.2 – This section develops what it means to hope by referring to the metaphorical statements of the life to come found in the bible.

10.3 – This section refers to both heaven and hell. It accepts the existence of hell but uses carefully crafted language about it. Hell is dependent on our choices and God's choice is always maximum mercy. But can any hell be worthy of a God of infinite love? We may make some mistakes in life and hurt people, but are we ever "worthy" of hell, given the concept of hell as eternal torture? Can we believe in both hell and infinite love? And how do we think of eternal justice if we choose not to believe in hell as worthy of God? Is there some kind of eternal accountability for so much that is done in this world that is awful and creates so many victims, and yet is not the eternal torture that is hell?

10.4 – Eternal life is resurrection life and it begins in this life. Death becomes a transition rather than a termination. Is this a comforting idea? Is it believable?

10.5 – This section refers to the end of things and to Christ's return or 'second coming' as it's referred to. Do you believe in a second coming? Does a Christian have to believe in this to be a Christian? "Creation will find fulfillment in God." In other words, the end of things and Christ's second coming is about the renewal of creation and the kingdom of God on earth rather than some escape into an eternal heaven. A beautiful idea. But can you believe it?

10.6,7 – Some final, positive statements of hope.