

STRETCH

OUR PART IN GOD'S STORY

STRETCH: OUR PART IN GOD'S STORY (WEEK 3: OUR MISSION)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONNECT (from last week): What is one specific way that you could grow in generosity?

WARM-UP Questions

1. If someone, who wasn't a Christian, asked what is the mission of God, what would you say?
2. How do you feel about being part of the mission of God? What do you think is your part?

READ Acts 2:22-41

3. Are you ever tempted to think that being involved in mission is for 'other people'?
4. Why is every Christian 'sent'? Why do, knowing Jesus, and being sent, go hand-in-hand?
5. What is the core message of God's mission to the world? How is forgiveness at the centre of that? Why does the truth of Jesus matter?
6. How does Peter recall the historical basis of Jesus, interpret what this means, and invite people to respond? How might we reflect those elements in our lives?
7. What is the significance of Peter describing Jesus' death as 'agonising'? How can it be possible that life is the fruit of Jesus' death?
8. What were the diverse ways that the early church proclaimed the message of Jesus? How were they empowered to live and preach in such radical ways?
9. How can we grow in a reliance on God's empowering Spirit for mission? Try to think of a practical example in which you struggle to live out God's mission.
10. What would it look like for us to be more clearly preaching the message of Jesus? What would it look like for us to be more clearly showing the message of Jesus?
11. In respect to our role in God's mission, what causes you most concern? How can you grow and develop in this area?
12. What effect did Peter's sermon have on the listeners? What do you think is meant by the description that they were 'cut to the heart'? Have you ever felt like this?
13. When the listeners asked 'what shall they do?', what was the response? Why are these still the same responses invited of all who seek Jesus today?
14. When we turn to Jesus, what gifts does God give us?

APPLY (to this week): What are some concrete choices you can make this week to be more actively seeking to serve God's mission through your life?

PRAY: *Almighty God, thank you for your comprehensive and relentless mission to the world! Thank you for your desire to draw us back to you, to remake the world, to eradicate evil, and establish your kingdom forever. Thank you that your mission plan culminated in the Lord Jesus and that it is through him that we can come to you. Please help us to rest in the power of Spirit and actively play our part in your mission to the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



GOING DEEPER

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GOING DEEPER RESOURCES & SUGGESTIONS

Each week in January, we will be providing additional resources that may help to go deeper with whatever series we're currently focusing on as a church. Resources could include recommended books, articles, online sermons, courses, or videos. These are optional extras! Please don't feel under pressure to look at every resource, but consider what could be useful to you (or your group if you are a small group leader).

Resources for Families

- Try praying together as a family for Christian mission all over the world. Pray also for Christian mission through the life of our church and in our city.

Get Acquainted with our Mission Partners

- Our mission partners are one of the ways that we are involved in the mission of God. Read all about them on our website: <http://stbarts.com.au/ministries/mission-partners/>

Video & Talks

- VIDEO: A brief overview of the book on the "Mission of God's People" by Christopher Wright. Watch an interview here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HW9IULCWVgo>
- VIDEO: The Scope of God's Mission (a lecture by Christopher Wright). Watch the video on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woXc4fZI7HM>
- VIDEO (for purchase): "Jesus, Paul and the Mission of God's People" by N T Wright (with responses by Michael Bird and Brian Rosner). See: <https://goo.gl/lnANUG>
- AUDIO: A series of lectures by John Dickson on "The Best Kept Secrets of Christian Mission" which took place at the Anglican Church of Noosa. See: <https://goo.gl/S74NQi>

Articles and Other Reading

- BOOK: "The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative" by Christopher Wright.
- BOOK: "Christian Mission in the Modern World" by John Stott
- BOOK: "The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission" by John Dickson

Talk 3/4 (Stretch: Our Part in God's Story): 15/01/17

"Growing in our Mission" by the Rev'd Adam Lowe

Bible Passage: Isaiah 55:1-7 & Acts 2:22-41

INTRODUCTION \ \ MISSION AND SENT

In January, we're exploring what it means to be stretched as we seek to follow Jesus.

- In the first week we considered what it means to be stretched in **devotion**, last week we considered what it means to be stretched in **generosity**, this week we're considering what it means to be stretched in **mission**.
- Sometimes when we think about God's mission,
of God's desire to draw people back to himself through Jesus Christ,
of God's desire to set the world right,
of God's plan for his kingdom to come in fullness,
we can be tempted to think: that's fantastic,
I'm all onboard: I'm just not really involved.
- Being involved in mission, is just for particular people who go overseas, or paid ministers or evangelists, maybe extraverted people, those who seem to have no embarrassment gene, but not for me.
- I'm not a missionary; I'm not on mission.
- *But here's the rub:* To know God is to be involved in his relentless mission to the world: Because to know Jesus is to be sent for his purposes.

- The word mission, comes from the *latin* “missio” which means **to be sent**.
- You cannot be a disciple of Jesus and resolve just to be a missional spectator. Because if you know him, he's called you, and if he's called you, he's sent you.
- Those two go hand-in-hand.

That shouldn't surprise us, it's one of the grand narratives of the Bible.

- Israel were to draw close, but thrust out as a light to the nations; Abraham was drawn in, but then had to get out of his country; Moses encountered God at the burning bush, but sent to Pharaoh; Isaiah experiences God, then was told to GO. Jesus calls many to follow him, and then commissions them to:

...go and make disciples of all nations... (Matthew 28)

...that just as the Father sent him, he now has sent those who follow him... (John 17)

Not that it necessarily means that we go to a new physical space, but we live with a new purpose and agenda for our lives.

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So in order for us to think about what it means to get on board with God's mission, we're going to have a look at a section of chapter 2 of the book of Acts.

- Specifically, we're looking at Peter's first sermon at Pentecost.
- *The Holy Spirit has descended, people were able to speak in different languages, many though they were drunk, and so Peter jumps up to clarify what's going on.*
- What they're witnessing today, is part of the fulfilment of everything God has promised, and the unfolding of his mission to the world, culminating in the Lord Jesus.
- And most helpfully we see, that with God:
- **Our Mission has a MESSAGE;**
Our Mission has a POWER; and
Our Mission invites RESPONSE.

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#1 MISSION WITH A MESSAGE \\ THE TRUTH OF JESUS CHRIST

First, when we embrace God's mission, it's a mission with a **MESSAGE**.
And that message centres on the **TRUTH** of Jesus Christ.

If you read through the Book of Acts,
you see a consistent pattern, that as people seek to be witnesses for Jesus,
they do three things:

- they **recall** the historical basis of Jesus;
they **interpret** his life, death, and resurrection through the Scriptures;
and **invite** people to respond to the news.
- They take the facts, they explain what they mean,
and then give an opportunity for it to sink into people's hearts.
- We're just going to look the first two of those now:
which is to say the **truth of Jesus**, and the **why of Jesus**.

As everyone in Acts 2 is confused by what's happening with the different languages,
Peter points to the prophet Joel to say that this is exactly what we've been waiting for.

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- This is the last days, which is to say the days in which God's plans are being fulfilled,
as signalled by God pouring out his Spirit,
in which - verse 21 - everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
- But then Peter does something remarkable.
- He draws immediate association between these last days, of salvation,
and the person of Jesus.

22 "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

- Peter in effect starts with Jesus, because it all centres on him.
- Through this section he quite methodically moves through the facts about Jesus.
His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation.
- It's a nice little snapshot, but what I want us to take careful note of,
is that these are not events that Peter is trying to twist people into believing,
but these are **historical** events that he's asking people to see the implication of.

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- **Jesus' life:** Jesus was accredited to you through miracles, wonders, and signs: *which means this was all clearly demonstrated.*
- **Jesus' death:** you know he was handed over and by whom, you know it was by the cross, *this is all a matter of public record and public witness.*
- **Jesus' resurrection:** I can tell you David died and was buried, go and visit his tomb, but Jesus' tomb is empty, lots of people saw him; we're all **witnesses to the fact.**
- If any of what Peter was saying was untrue, people could have instantly dismissed it. People could have laughed it off, but that's not what happens.
- See what Peter is doing, is showing that this great event, is underpinned by reality. It's a surprising reality, but it's not a secret, and you can't just dismiss it.
- That means that as followers of Jesus, the mission in which God involves us, is not based simply on an idea, or a particular point of view, **but truth.**
- If you're here today and you're not sure about Jesus, about his claims, I want to encourage you to look the facts about his life, death, and resurrection, because when you see the evidence that support these things, *I'm convinced that the only possible rational response is, is to ask what does this mean?*

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We see a big clue in verse 24.

But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

- The word **agony** here that Peter uses doesn't just mean pain, it refers to the pains of childbirth.
- And so big picture, Peter is pointing to the reality, that through Jesus' death and resurrection, life is being opened up.
- Sin put him there, but death couldn't hold him down.
- That this was God's plan all along, v.23, *this man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge*, he opened a way intentionally, that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God.
- Jesus embraced the consequence of his mission, so that God's mission of the complete restoration of the world, could be brought to completion.
- **We have a mission that is grounded in the truth of who Jesus is, and why he came.**

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#2 MISSION WITH A POWER \\ HOLY SPIRIT LIFE TRANSFORMING

Second, we have a mission with **POWER**.

- Often in Christianity, when it come to sharing the message of Jesus, *there's a false dichotomy set up between speaking the message and demonstrating the message.*
- When it's completely evident, reading through the history of the early church in Acts, that they radically proclaimed the **message of our mission**, through their whole lives.
- A quick survey of Acts, and we see a consistent pattern.
*they preached clearly and boldly,
they were concerned for the the poor and unwell,
they were a worshipping and prayerful community.*
- All that they did proclaimed the message of Jesus.
- It shocked those around them.

Many historians over the centuries have tried to figure out why Christianity grew so rapidly in the first three centuries. And often, you see three reflections.

- **(a) That Christians died so well.** They said that Christians faced death and persecution in a way that they never really had seen people before.

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- **(b) They more inclusive than any other religion.** So many religious drew boundaries between race or social status, but Christianity just over-road all of that.
- **(c) They just seemed to care for everyone.** Emperor Julian was frustrated by the degree to which the Christians so shamelessly cared for anyone. Whilst the Romans might take care of the Roman poor, Christians indiscriminately loved everyone.
- They were persecuted, beaten, locked up in jail, but nothing would seem to deter them from preaching the news of Jesus and sharing his love with all whom they encountered.

I mean imagine what that looks like for us in Toowoomba.

What would it look like for us to be relentlessly preaching the message of Jesus?

What would it look like for us to be relentlessly showing the love of Jesus?

- *If you're like me, that might get you thinking: that all seems pretty overwhelming.*
- But we can take great encouragement, because the only reason that the early church could live in such a radical way that caused so many to come to faith, was because their engagement in God's mission was powered by the Holy Spirit.
- That's the whole context of the passage.
- See we're not only convicted by the truth of Jesus, but we're empowered by his Spirit.

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- Jesus promised that to the disciples in the upper room.
Jesus promised that in the great commission, he didn't only send them, but he promised that he would be with them.
- This is the most amazing news.
- As we earnestly seek to make and mature disciples of Jesus, sharing the message of Jesus with our words, showing the love of Jesus with our lives, we don't have to rely on our own strength or power, but by the very power of the one to whom the mission belongs.
- It prevents us from being arrogant and thinking that any fruit is due to us; It guards us from being overwhelmed or thinking we're not good enough.
- Is it costly? Absolutely! Can it be hard? Most certainly!
- *But whatever God asks of us is possible, if we submit to him and his power at work in us.*

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#3 MISSION INVITES RESPONSE \\ CUT TO THE HEART

Finally, the mission of God, **INVITES RESPONSE**.

When Peter presents the historical basis for the truth of Jesus,
When Peter explains the why of Jesus, people are led to a point of decision.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (v.37)

Note, that Christianity and the claims of Christianity are not just intellectual doctrines to which we ascribe, but truth which convicts our whole being.

- These are not just historical facts, but news that impinges on our total reality!
- When Acts reports that it cuts to their hearts, this is a deep resonance. Heart is reflective of meaning their inner selves.
- Do you see what's happening here?
- For the first time, those gathered are not only seeing who Jesus is - Lord and Messiah; they are not only seeing what Jesus did, and why he had to do it, but they're seeing that it was also for them.

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- You know what is happening here? When they see the costliness of what Jesus has done, they're convicted of sin, *that part of the reason was on the cross, was because of them.*
- Peter knew that feeling.
He denied Jesus three times.
And, as recorded in Luke's Gospel,
it's in that moment, that from the cross, the Lord turned and looked straight at him.
- I bet Peter was cut to the heart too.

Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be. That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

- When you truly see Jesus for who he is, of what he's done,
the only appropriate response is that it cuts to the heart.
Because suddenly this is not just real, but it's real to you.

So they ask, "what shall we do?"

- That's not a casual question, this is anxious petition.
- The answer, repent and be baptised.
It's implied here that they repent and believe.

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- *Repent* means, to do a 180. It means to change the direction of your life.
That instead of relying on yourself, that you turn to Christ,
are sorry for not having him as the Lord of your life,
are thankful that he died for you,
and you trust in him as the Lord of your life.
- We have so many agendas in our lives, we set out on so many missions,
but when you turn to God, his mission becomes your own.
- For the Jews gathered, the idea of submitting to baptism was potentially humiliating.
- Jews considered baptism necessary for Gentiles converting to Judaism,
but here they are to submit to a new baptism in the name of the one who had been
rejected, as a clear and public act of their repentance and faith in him.

And of course the amazing news is that as we respond to that news,
every person receives two gifts.

- **The forgiveness of sins:** our debt has been wiped clean.
and the gift of the Holy Spirit: to regenerate, indwell, and transform...
- *and sent you out to witness to what you now know is true,
because you're now part of the greatest mission that the universe has ever known: God's.*

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CONCLUSION \\ GOD'S MISSION IS OUR MISSION

I just think it's so remarkable that God invites us to participate in his mission.
God's new kingdom is bursting into the world!
God is relentlessly pursuing people through his son,
And his followers are announcing and demonstrating this great news.

- That wherever we are,
with who ever we have contact,
with whatever resources we have,
with whatever we do,
with whatever skills we possess,
in the life of this community and beyond,
there are people whom God wants to reach through you.
- On this day recorded in Acts, the church in Jerusalem multiplied 26 times.
They went from 120 to 3120 in just one day.
- And it was possible, not because of how amazing the followers of Jesus were,
but because the message was true, it was powered by the Holy Spirit,
and that they responded to God and made his mission their own.

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- Do you know what that means? That you can become a Christian today,
and receive the great gift of forgiveness and the Spirit,
and be part of God's mission and his forever kingdom.

In the history of the universe, in the history of God's salvation plan,
we stand in the most amazing time.

- *Jesus has come and now we're waiting for him to come back;
when he will sort out the world once and for all.*
- *And as we straddle that time, we have the job to announce this Good News,
of God's coming kingdom, with our words and with our lives.*
- *The whole Gospel,
through the whole Church,
to the whole world.*

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