

Good evening everybody welcome to Tuesday Evening Sermon where we dig a bit more into God's word. Thank-you for putting in the time to be here and to grow in your relationship with God. Sometimes Tuesday Sermon is about recapping a previous series but tonight is a bit of a touching point on some extra reflections on Sunday's sermon and a bit of a transition I guess to aid that transition from our last series into our Advent series and into the new year potentially.

Today we're also going to look at a number of different passages in the scriptures and we're going to look at shorter portions than we did with our sermon last month but still a number of portions we were going to jump about and draw out different things from different parts of the scriptures. So get ready with your Bible and whether it be a Bible App or a hard copy, get ready with your Bible so you can follow me through with us because there won't be any slides on screen.

But before we do that let us take a moment to pray so let us pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight oh Lord our strength and our Redeemer, Amen

So in our last series we had seven weeks on the theme of justice and we saw how core justice is to the heart of God, that he is a God who loves justice and so His people need to be your people who seek justice and hopefully that series began to sow some thoughts and ideas or maybe brought affirmation. If you're someone who seeks justice maybe in your everyday work or in your volunteering and maybe up till now you've not really heard the Church speak much about justice and so hopefully that series was of some help and I'm grateful for the folks that introduced elements within Community Corner just to get trying to help make it practical as well. I'm sure that we'll need to return to the theme of justice again in future years and to help us grow in this because I'm not sure it's something that we often think about and we need to grow and mature in that way but as we saw on Sunday we're not only called to justice we're called to another important role. So let me recap a few verses for us this is from Matthew chapter 28 at verse 18 - Matthew 28

Then Jesus came to them and said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to be everything I have commanded you, and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age."

Likewise we could jump into the book of Acts chapter 1 at verse 8; Jesus has risen from the dead and he has been meeting with the disciples teaching them further about the kingdom of God and he says to them: Acts 1 verse 8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

So "Yes" we are called to justice, to seek it, to make it a priority, but we are also called to go and share our faith and to help others grow and become Christians themselves. And so, part of our purpose here at Brightons is to invite people to follow Jesus and I'm so encouraged that the Kirk Session agreed with the Strategy Group that this should be part of our purpose, to invite people to follow Jesus and so it's got to be a core part of our Church life and more than just words on a nice document or a website because Jesus calls us to go and make disciples; He calls us to be His witnesses, His ambassadors to the nations and to our neighbors, and often, sadly, in the Church, it seems to have been one or the other between justice and what we call evangelism, that we are either a Church that pursues justice and ignores evangelism or a Church that does

evangelism but we ignore justice. And from since the beginning of the Church, since the beginning of God's people thousands of years ago, beginning with Israel, there has been that dual call of justice but also to be a light to the nations and so seek to share the faith with others. Because if you don't have evangelism you miss out on a lot of important things being realized and we'll touch on a few of those just now. But if you don't have justice your message just doesn't help particularly in today's society and world that if you don't show that compassion, if you don't show that concern, then it just feels like empty religion and it's not just today that that's been a case. One of the huge times of growth within the Church was about 300 day or so when there was a huge plague in the Roman Empire and it was the Christians who put their lives at risk and showed compassion to neighbors when the rich Romans fled to keep themselves safe, but because the Christians showed that care and concern then the people began to become much more receptive to the Christian message and people came to faith and the Church grew

And I see that in other organizations as well. CAP (Christians Against Poverty) pursues justice, seeks to help people in the midst of brokenness but it's very clear also about giving the opportunity to hear more about the Christian faith about what fuels us. Now they don't force it down anyone's throat. I believe it is very gently done having known workers in that field of work, but they hold them both together, they seek to hold them in tension and one they help people get out of debt but two they often help people to meet with Jesus and both elements transform their lives in the more complete way that God hopes for us when we experience his shalom. It's the physical and the spiritual. Or one of my other favorite organizations is One Life and One Life it seeks to earn the right to speak into the lives of young people and I think that is key in our generation we have to earn the right now we're not in Christendom any longer we don't have an automatic right to go into schools or to share with people we have to earn the right and so it's keeping that tension between justice and evangelism. But both are part of the mission of God.

But if we don't heed the great commission, if we don't seek to share our faith, then we face some serious issues and problems and we miss out on a lot as well and I want to briefly talk about three things that we miss out on and that are so crucial for us to bear in mind.

Firstly, as I was speaking about on Sunday, part of sharing our faith is partly as part of growing in our maturity as children of God, as followers of Jesus, and we sought to give that idea about sharing the Christmas card this advent season with a neighbor or a friend and inviting them to watch a service. And so sharing our faith is so key in helping us grow. Let me take you to Luke chapter 10; Luke chapter 10 and we'll read a couple of verses here 1 to 3 and then 8 to 10; Luke 10 at verse 1 – “After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into his harvest field. Go, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. When you enter a town (this is verse 8) and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you, heal those who are ill and tell them the kingdom of God has come near to you.”

Here we're seeing part of the training model of Jesus, how he disciplined his disciples verse 1 says “the Lord appointed seventy-two others” others to the 12 disciples and sent them out two by two. So we can see here that the going out to share the gospel, to share the good news, to evangelize wasn't just for the apostles, it wasn't just for the big-yins, those that are super confident and got a really important role. Every disciple of Jesus was called to this. He began with the 12 and then moved on to the 72. And we see it just replicated time and time again in the life of the Church and we'll speak more about that in a moment. Jesus says the harvest is pointing about the workers are few and so he calls more he grows this movement which will one day be the Church to go and share the good news of the kingdom of God. That the kingdom has

come near through Jesus breaking into our world, coming into the world as a babe. Growing up and entering into this ministry, anointed by the spirit. The kingdom has come near and he sends out the 72 others. Likely this 72 had been journeying with Jesus for a while as his ministry grows, as he shows compassion and seeks justice. It begins to open doors and people become receptive. He begins to gather people around him a huge crowd of people and he initially picks the 12 but then he's gotten 72 others that he has picked and he sends them out. He's taking them under his wing to grow them and his disciples and in maturity. But the time comes when they have to go out. Can you imagine being the 72 others? Like you've seen the other 12 get picked and they are like the superstars; they are like your models and heroes, and now it's your turn! He's probably sent them out two by two again because that was the model of Jesus. Can you imagine being one of the pairs in that 72? "Jesus you want me to go out? You want me to go out and heal and preach? Like Jesus, Okay, you can do it because, well, you're the son of God - and the 12 can do it because they're the special guys, they're the ones that you're going to build your Church upon." But, but us? Me? That would have been really scary. But in the model of Jesus of how you grow in faith and disciple others, there comes a time when you have to go and share your faith. And if you don't take that step, and if you don't follow the model of Jesus, eventually your growth, my growth, our growth as a Christian becomes stifled, stunted. We get capped. And I wonder if that's part of the reason that the Church in Scotland, the Church of Scotland is in such dire straights, because we are not particularly mature in our faith. Sure we can probably do the justice thing reasonably okay. We are very active and we help other people and we try our best to be good people, but that has capped us because we have bought into that thing that "well I'm an introvert our faith is very personal" or "I don't feel comfortable with this" and so we hit a ceiling. But we need to get through that ceiling if we are to grow and if we are to see the Church grow as well.

I think I was very blessed that when I came to faith at nineteen. Within a month I started university and I came into an environment within the Christian Union there where it was just natural that you shared your faith, you sought to do it. Now we did it in some terrible ways - surveys and street preaching and different things and I'm not advocating any of that! But I grew phenomenally in my faith, in confidence in my faith, and until actually you have to try and articulate what you believe and why you believe it and help others to engage with that, your growth is stunted. Or trying to share your testimony - if you can't share your testimony, and I'm not saying you have to do it on Testimony Tuesday, but if you can't share that testimony, if you can't share how you journeyed in faith and came to faith and have grown in faith and how your faith has made a difference to you, again, your growth will be capped, And the number of people who have said either during Testimony Tuesday or after Testimony Tuesday "Actually, that was really scary at first but it really helped me" - there's quite a few who have said that - and so if we are to grow as ambassadors, if we are to grow as disciples we need to follow the model of Jesus and we need to learn ways to share our faith. Now it might not be in public ways, it might not be in Testimony Tuesday, it might not be as I do it, but somehow, some way we need to learn to grow and share our faith.

Because point two of the really important reasons for sharing our faith is about the future of the Church in this area and in Scotland, anywhere. Let's turn to Acts chapter 11 at verse 19. Acts 11 verse 19 - "Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed, travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord."

Another key reason for heeding the call of Jesus to be as ambassadors, to go make disciples, to share the good news of the Lord Jesus and of His kingdom, is that's how the Church grows. If the disciples had just stuck to the Jews or if the disciples, because they faced persecution in difficult times, had decided just to become very personal about their faith or retreat, then things would just have died out, in that area, maybe even more broadly. But they didn't. They were bold. They would not allow what they had experienced to stay for them and so they spoke about the good news and the Church grew. A great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

You know I think most of us are aware that the Church is declining in Scotland and particularly in the Church of Scotland I think the statistics are something like in the last 20 years the membership of the Church of Scotland has halved, halved, has halved. It is really quite small now in comparison to what it used to be. The population that would identify as Christian and as having an active faith is much smaller than it used to be. And this is true also of Brightons. I don't think we always are aware of it because when we've been able to gather in person and we've also had quite a busy Sunday service and we so we think we're doing pretty well and we feel quite secure and it kind of insulates us a little bit. But, for example, in the last two years in my time we've had 23 deaths and by the end of January, hopefully, we'll have about 17 new members because there's hopefully some new members joining us just before Christmas. So that's pretty good but that is not average and still we are declining there and let's not overlook that.

Or, for example, I dug into some of the statistics as well: currently only 35% of our membership is under 65 versus 81% nationally within Scotland. 35% under 65, 81% nationally. And that's important because, well the Church doesn't just happen. If we are to sustain what we do, if we're to expand what we're going to do, then we do need to see people coming in. We do need to go out and be able to share our faith because in 10 years time, if things don't significantly change, we'll have 20% under 65 versus what is projected to be 76% nationally. 20%, 20%! And, to be honest, that 35 to 20% just now, it's already stretched in a lot of ways. If I look around and I'm looking around for someone to do a job or do something else I'm often having to ask people who are already doing a lot.

We need to understand that Brightons faces this issue as much as any other Church. Yes, we're unable to do a lot just now but if things don't change there is going to come a point in the next five, ten years when we're gonna have to stop doing what we do if things don't change. We're gonna have to not shut up shop, but we might not be able to keep running Boys Brigade, Girls Brigade, Sunday School, Pre-Fives as we've been doing. All these things that we take great joy in and we've got history and we've been running it for decades. Some of this is going to stop if we're not more active about sharing our faith, and that's a reality we just have to become aware of.

And we all have to be part of it. It can't just rest on me or select group, the extroverts, those that are comfortable and confident in their faith. We all need to be involved in this because a large part of my time, for example, is getting taken up with other things. And that's okay because I think we're in a season where ministers across the Church of Scotland are going to have a much broader kind of remit. It'll be a bit more strategic. It'll be a bit more strategic and where time is invested to grow and train up others because the model that we've inherited of ministers being heavily pastoral and kind of neglecting the development aspect and the strategic aspect, is just not working anymore. That has to change. We probably have to go back to a little bit more of what Jesus did where he had the 12 and he invested heavily and then he had the 72 and we see that kind of transition in ministers. And so that does require us to transition in how we do Church as well.

So, for our own maturity and growth, we need to get involved in sharing our faith. For the future of our Church, for the spread of the gospel we need to get involved in sharing our faith.

But also, for those that we are seeking to reach out to, we need to share our faith as well.

Let's jump to John chapter 3. John chapter 3 at verse 5 – "Jesus said to Nicodemus "Very truly I tell you, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit."

Again and again across the scriptures, in every gospel, nearly every letter there is mentioned somewhere to the necessity of sharing the faith and helping others to choose to follow Jesus for their own benefit. Not just in the present time, because there is great benefit in the present time to following Jesus, that hope, that light, that joy, that peace that can only come through a relationship with Him is there, is for now, but they is also that eternal dynamic and we don't speak often of it and I doubt you're going to hear very many sermons of fire and brimstone from me you'll be glad to hear, but there is an eternal dynamic to all this and we need to remember that. No-one can enter the kingdom of God unless they're born of water and the spirit.

Doesn't give very much leeway - and I know we get pretty uncomfortable with that. I get pretty uncomfortable with that. It's not often part of my chat with people but it seems to be a reality within the scriptures.

And then, particularly in today's society, we are uncomfortable with that dynamic and we seek maybe to try and get ways around it or we allow ourselves to be shaped by the culture rather than by the scriptures. So, for example, there was there is a Christian author called Rob Bell - he was a pastor in the States and for a long time. I really revered Rob Bell his messages were relevant understandable, very helpful, and we did some DVD series called Nooma and they were great, very powerful. And I think I've maybe read a couple of these books but I had friends that read his material and I think I'd listen to sermons and such like, but then Rob Bell produced a book called Love Wins and on this cover that sounds very appealing. Doesn't it? Love Wins! Who doesn't want that? Who doesn't want to share that message? But really his message wasn't watertight. It lacked substance and you read the book and got to the end of it and basically all that he had was a hope and a prayer. Even if that, to be honest. A hope that there might be another chance that once we die maybe we'll have the opportunity to appreciate something of God in Jesus and there'll be another chance, that was where he ended up kind of landing -

but he his argument was pretty flimsy.

I think most of us would like that to be the case. I think most of us really want love to win,

and we see that in - I think we still see that in the scriptures that the love of God wins. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. Love still wins, but love is still just love does not delight in evil, and so God can't overlook sin. There is an eternal dynamic to things.

And I think we have a hope that stands up and is greater than Rob Bell's flimsy argument that let's hope that there's another chance on the other side. We don't need that flimsy hoping argument, We have a hope in Jesus and all you need to do is put your faith in Him and bow the knee to Him. And yeah that's huge, and it's costly in different ways but Wow! I would never turn my back on Him now, because following Jesus, having bent the knee to Jesus, has changed my

life for the better, And His wisdom, His ways are so much better than mine or any others I've ever come across.

So, there's an eternal dynamic, but as we know, and see within Luke chapter 15, we have a heavenly Father who welcomes us home, who is waiting to welcome us home, and not only waiting to welcome us home, he sacrifices something of Himself to welcome us all.

Luke 15 at verse 20 – “So the younger son got up and went to his father, but while he was still a long way off his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants “Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened in calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate for this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and this found. So they began to celebrate.”

In Advent we remember the love of God that sent his Son into the world. The person, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, God himself came into our broken world, into our darkness, to seek and save the lost. You and me, This world. And He's not just waiting, He's pursuing. There is that welcome home to everyone, and we are called to share that message. To make it known. We are called to be ambassadors of this incredible good news, this incredible invitation, this incredible welcome home from God.

And if we want to grow in our faith, if we want our Church to grow and if we want individuals to know, the joy, the blessing, the hope that only comes through Jesus, both for this life and for the next, we need to share our faith. We need to learn how to share our faith. We need to have boldness and not allow the excuses that we've used and utilized for so long to hinder us and cap us and restrict us and stunt us. We need to cast them aside Church.

And we need to go out into our neighborhoods, into our families and friends and one way or another share the faith.

I'm not saying I have all the answers. I'm not even sure necessarily how to do this, but if we don't have a deep conviction, our future actions won't change.

So, may we heed the invitation of Jesus. May we have that deep conviction and begin to explore ways, even this advent season, of sharing the welcome of God.

Amen

Let us take a moment to pray.

Our God and Heavenly Father, through Your Son You have called us to a high calling, an important calling, to share the good news of Jesus and of Your kingdom breaking into the world, of that welcome home to one and all. I pray that You would come and fill us afresh with Your Spirit and give to us a holy boldness to invite someone this Advent, to consider the welcome of God and then into the New Year Lord teach us your ways, give to us opportunities, help us to become more proactive in sharing our faith. Maybe it's as simple as saying “I will pray for you” maybe even there in person on the phone “Can I pray with you just now?” Lord, who knows there are many ways that You might lead us in this and equip us but Lord it begins with a deep conviction and I would ask that we would have a deep conviction and that from us empowered by Your Spirit, Your gospel, Your message would ring out loud and clear across this area and

through your people, to see Your Church grow. to see Your Kingdom grow, to see You receive more glory and honour in Your rightful place and to see people come to know You, come to know Your joy and Your hope and Your peace and Your love and Your purposes both for now

and for all eternity

I ask this Father in Jesus name. Amen

Friends, thanks for joining us for our Tuesday Evening Sermon. Great to have you share in this. Get in touch if you want to talk through anything.

This Thursday we've got our live prayer at 8 15 - join us on our Youtube channel or in our Zoom room.

Then we'll be back on Sunday.

We've got a program of Tuesday events coming up across the whole of December, so check the notices out for details of that. Next Tuesday evening we've got an introduction to the new Purpose and Values agreed by the Kirk Session at the end of October. We mentioned them in the most recent Bright Lights and they're on the front page of our new website. Go check that out online. But join us next Tuesday if you want to hear a little bit more as you hear a few folks just reflect on how we got to where we're at, what these purpose and values means for us, why this might be useful going forward. Come check it out next Tuesday evening. We hope to see you join us then.

As you go from here, the blessing of God, Almighty Father, Son and Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you this night and forevermore.

Amen.