

THE FIVE MARKS *of* MISSION

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We're all on a journey, whether we make our home right here or a long way from here or in several places around the world. Jesus' early community of followers called their movement "the way" or "the road." To be a Christian means being on a journey, even if we never travel very far from where we were born.

We begin that journey in baptism, passing through death by drowning into new life following Jesus. That journey sets us on the road toward the city set on a hill, or the new Jerusalem – a healed and repaired world, what we call the reign of God, the beloved community, shalom. We're on the same road that Jesus claimed in his hometown synagogue, when he read from Isaiah's vision:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

[cf Isaiah 61]

And then he says, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

We've been anointed, too, for the same kind of work—in baptism, and when we confirm those promises made at our baptism, and every time we gather for communion, when we're sent out from this place— go forth into the world to seek and serve Christ. That sending gives the name to our journey—mission— it means going to be God's partners in creating a renewed and reconciled creation. That is what we pray so regularly, that your kingdom come on earth as it exists in heaven. That is the year of the Lord's favor.

The year of the Lord's favor is about the world God intended in creation – a repaired world, of restored relationship with God, humanity,

and creation, a society of justice, where human beings live in right relationship with one another. It looks like human beings caring for the garden of God's creation— for all creatures and all creation— where glaciers stop melting, and island homes no longer disappear, where human beings can grow crops and harvest the fruit of the earth and the fish of the seas in abundance, where everyone has plenty to eat, and all people can live a full life in peace because there are right and just relationships among them.

Anglicans have a five— fold understanding of what that repair work looks like: the 5 marks of mission— or signposts along the road. The inukshuks¹ on this journey point us in very particular directions and ways of healing.

1. Proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God— that vision of a healed world, bigger than us all, that needs each of us to assist in creating
2. Teach, baptize, nurture new believers — encouragement, formation; how to live life on the road, always looking for new partners
3. Respond to human need with loving service— this is the kind of work Jesus is claiming in that piece he read in the synagogue, the same kind of feeding and healing work he did so much of, the caring for people who need comfort in the midst of grief, liberation from prisons, and hope in the face of loss and darkness

4. Transform unjust systems of society, challenge all kinds of violence, pursue peace and reconciliation—counter the hate, exclusion, and evil of this world with love
5. Care for the earth, the garden in which we are set, filled with resources to be stewarded for the good of every creature.

What does it look like right here?

Most of this work of mission happens in the world. Only the second mark, about teaching and baptizing and nurturing new believers, is primarily centered in this community. Most of the rest happens in our daily lives, as we greet the stranger and find our neighbors. That's what Paul means when he says to his community in Rome, present yourselves as a living sacrifice— offer your lives as healers and reconcilers and builders of the dream of God. And remember that this body of Christ has a whole lot of different parts, each one with different gifts, and they're all essential to building that renewed city.

Communities build up their members by helping them to discover their unique gifts. When do you feel most alive, most creative, most filled with the glory of God? Is it when you are teaching, healing, fishing, gardening? Using those God—given gifts effectively helps to heal and reconcile the world.

A COUPLE *of* EXAMPLES
of WHAT MISSION LOOKS LIKE:

Polio is a terrible disease that's been eradicated from most parts of the world. People, especially children, still get the disease in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria— and almost nowhere else. The campaign to end polio has been working very hard to vaccinate children and wipe out the virus, and it could probably be accomplished within five years. Only a few hundred children are infected and paralyzed each year, but eliminating the disease means vaccinating large populations so no one can pass on the virus. Those nations where polio still survives have large groups of people who are very suspicious of the vaccine campaigns.

A number of health workers have been murdered because of those suspicions— that the vaccine actually has HIV in it, or some kind of poison or contraceptive, or that American spies are using the campaign for other purposes. There aren't enough security forces to protect all the health workers, but brave people keep signing up to help because they believe so fervently in the possibility of healing. That's mission— offering yourself as a living sacrifice.

There's another example in North Carolina, where the state legislature has been systematically dismantling most of the state's social safety net. People of faith, including Episcopalians, have been going to the capitol on Mondays for the last three months to

protest and preach about what God's world is supposed to look like – food for the hungry, jobs for the unemployed, just wages for all, healing for the sick, adequate education for all children, and a reasonable sharing of the resources that God has given us all. They call their witness about transforming social injustice Moral Mondays, and it's beginning to get the attention of the wider public.

This kind of mission may involve being arrested for standing up for what you believe is right – another form of living sacrifice.

Sometimes mission is literally stepping out the door and seeing who and what is there on the doorstep. A growing number of congregations are looking at the land where their buildings sit, and turning it into gardens. Vegetables, fruit, even grain is being grown and shared with the community, or land provided for residents to raise their own. There is a wonderful example in Sitka— St. Peter's Farm. Not only are a lot more hungry people being fed with nutritious food, but the stewardship of the land is far better when it's planted in gardens rather than lawns, which take enormous inputs of fertilizer, water, and pesticides. Gardeners are putting their gifts to work, along with organizers, and even cooking teachers, and diggers and weeders— and children are learning about where food comes from. It takes the sweat and stoop labor of many, and the harvest is indeed plentiful.

Mission turns outward and uses the gifts God has given each of us to love our neighbors.

Those outward and public acts are doing justice, and building that dream of God's for a healed world. Doing that is what Jesus meant when he said, "This scripture is being fulfilled today." That's what we're anointed and sent to do – so when we come to the end of this service, we're going to be invited to "get up, get out, and get lost" in serving the world around us.

¹ *An inukshuk is a cairn of large rocks, often in human form, used by Arctic Coast peoples to mark a way in the treeless tundra.*