



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### Last Sunday after Epiphany (C)

#### World Mission

**[RCL] Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]**

*This sermon, marking World Mission Sunday, was written by the Rt. Rev. Anthony Poggo, secretary general of the Anglican Communion.*

On this World Mission Sunday, I would like to begin by looking at the word “mission.” One of the definitions given by the dictionary is, “The work of teaching people about Christianity, especially in a foreign country;” but the work of mission is much broader than just teaching Christianity. It's also about living it and ministering in a holistic way that is meeting the physical and spiritual needs of the people.

A Biblical passage of significance that underpins my thoughts on mission is what Jesus himself read as he embarked on his ministry. This is Jesus' address in Nazareth in Luke 4:18. This verse has been referred to as the “Nazarene Manifesto.” Political parties often outline their manifestos before an election, and, as Christians, the Nazarene Manifesto is also our own as Jesus' followers. Luke 4:18 shows us that Jesus' ministry was not only aimed at spiritual needs, but both spiritual *and* physical.

The preaching of the Good News should be holistic. You cannot go and preach the Good News and leave a person to die due to lack of food. In this case, you need to help them with their food needs. In many places in the world where poverty and food scarcity are rife, when we say the Lord's Prayer and ask God to “give us this day our daily bread,” we must pray for God's provision, but we also live out that prayer with action. We must care for our neighbor. We must take practical action to alleviate hunger. The Nazarene Manifesto also means that prisoners should be free from physical and spiritual oppression. This means campaigning or lobbying and doing advocacy for those who are wrongly arrested or arrested for their faith, and bringing pressure to bear on governments that are mistreating their people.

The Anglican Communion's definition of mission, called the Five Marks of Mission, expresses the Anglican Communion's common commitment to an understanding of God's holistic and integral mission. They are abbreviated in the five words: Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform, and Treasure. These marks of mission are central to us as Anglicans and important to us all. I believe that they are a summary of what all mission is about.

The definition begins by saying that the mission of the church is the mission of Christ. So, all mission is rooted in Christ. Then it spells out what this means:

- 1) To **tell** or proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- 2) To **teach**, baptize, and nurture new believers
- 3) To **tend** and to respond to human need by loving service
- 4) To **transform** unjust structures of society to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation, and
- 5) To **treasure** and strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

The emergence of these marks of mission over the last 40 years, supported by all wings of Anglicanism, is an example of a positive and encouraging development in the Anglican Communion.

In our Gospel reading, we read of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. Jesus is transformed before the three disciples, Peter, John, and James. The three disciples are the ones that Jesus often took to special functions and occasions. During the Transfiguration, Elijah and Moses appeared to them. Jesus spoke to the two of them. They spoke about his pending departure in Jerusalem, that is, about his death, in chapter 9 verse 31. Elijah and Moses have a lot of similarities - both cross rivers, both were not buried, and were taken alive, as we read in Deuteronomy 34:5-6.

The Transfiguration is one of the occasions in which Jesus' divine nature was affirmed. Jesus' appearance was changed through divine power. There was a voice that affirmed him, saying, "This is my beloved Son whom I love." The same thing also happened during his baptism. The significance of this Transfiguration, according to the African Bible Commentary, is that glory comes through suffering. Jesus was engaged in prayer. While praying, his face and clothes underwent a transformation that gave the impression of a heavenly glory.

In verse 36, we read that after the disciples heard God's voice affirming that Jesus is the son of God, they kept quiet and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen. Why is that? It is possible that this was because the time was not right for them to share this information. After Jesus' resurrection, he asked his disciples to go and make disciples. This also applies to us as his followers. We are to be his witnesses. This command is given in Matthew 28:18-20. This passage is one of the last things that Jesus said. In Africa, we take the last words of a person who is about to die very seriously. This means that, as believers, we need to take this command very seriously. It is referred to as the Great Commission. If we separate the word into "com-" and "mission," we get the concept of "with mission." This can mean that the mission that Christ has given us is to be done *with him* and *not on our own*. This passage is not only addressed to the ordained but to all believers.

We read in Exodus 34, that when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets in his hand, he did not know that his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites

saw Moses, they were afraid to come near him because of the shine on his face. When we meet God daily through his Word and in prayer, we will come to feel that shine, that we have been heard by him and that he has spoken to us. For some people, this is through the Eucharist. For others, it is by studying the Word of God. As we do so, we will want to share the Word of God with others and be witnesses in a holistic way.

One of the things that we focus on at the Anglican Communion Office is relationships. It is important that we relate well with each other since we are one Anglican and Episcopalian family. As the Anglican Communion, we are many fellowships, or provinces, but one family. Each of our 42 provinces in the Anglican Communion are autonomous, yet we are interdependent. In fact, there are many [more] things that unite us than that divide us.

I'm aware of Anglican mission organizations who send mission partners from one part of the communion to another. They support each other in mission and learn a lot from each other. The sending of mission partners across provinces should be two-way. It should not only be from north to south but south to south and south to north. When I was diocesan bishop in South Sudan, our diocese had mission partners from Nigeria, the Netherlands, and from Asia. We also had a companion diocesan link with the Diocese of Bethlehem in Pennsylvania as well as an internal relationship with the Diocese of Maridi in South Sudan. When I visited the provinces of Korea and Japan in October 2024, I was encouraged to see that there are many Korean mission partners serving in Japan. And for those of you who know the history of the hostilities between these two nations, who were at war with each other but are now collaborating in sharing the Good News, this shows the reconciliation power of Jesus Christ at work. At the Anglican Communion Office, we continue to encourage companion links for similar reasons - to build friendship, support, and learn from each other.

On this World Mission Sunday, I would like to remind each one of us that we should all be witnesses for Christ. What is a witness? A witness is a person who has seen or heard what they're witnessing about. A true Christian witness will testify about what they have experienced in their lives in a holistic way. Christian witness is giving and receiving the Good News of salvation in Christ with others. It is prayerfully sharing in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the rest to God. One cannot meet Jesus and not experience transformation. In the same way that the disciples experienced [the] Transfiguration on top of the mountain, we, when we read God's word or pray to him, we will meet him, and he will transform us.

*This sermon was written by **the Rt. Rev. Anthony Poggo**, secretary general of the Anglican Communion. With this World Mission Sunday sermon, he sends greetings from the Anglican Communion Office (ACO), the official secretariat for the Anglican Communion, in London. Poggo is responsible for the leadership and management of this office that serves and strengthens the life of the communion around the world. The work is wide-ranging and includes facilitating Anglican meetings like the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), and primates' meetings, supporting the work of the Archbishop of Canterbury, convening ecumenical dialogues, championing Anglican advocacy on global issues, and representing Anglican voices at the United Nations. The office aims to connect people around the world so Anglicans can work together in mission and unity.*