

Synod Charge 2017
Nelson Cathedral
31st August 2017
Romans 15:14–21
Luke 19:37-44



97% of the world has heard of Coca-Cola.
72% of the world has seen a can of Coca-Cola.
51% of the world has tasted a can of Coca-Cola.
Coke has only been around 125 years (1892).

Do you know what the mission statement of the Coca-Cola Corporation is?
'To put a can of coke in the hands of everyone in the world.'

It's *that* clearly articulated. And all their resources are put toward seeing that mission fulfilled. But they are struggling just at the moment. The world-wide campaign to reduce the amount of sugar we consume is having an effect on Coca-Cola sales. So they have appointed a Spaniard, Marcos de Quinto, as CMO (chief Marketing Officer), on an annual salary of \$750,000 (plus ex-pat allowance of \$300,000 and stock grant of 2.5 million shares). His job is to market Coke so that this downturn in sales is addressed and their mission achieved.

For this incredible salary he has come up with a brand new slogan for Coke: 'Taste the feeling'. In an interview at the launch of Coca-Cola's new slogan he said *'Coke had started to talk in a preachy way to people. And Coca-Cola has always been a simple pleasure'* he added. *"The bigness of Coca-Cola resides in its humbleness, in its simplicity."* But *"the more we tried... to preach to the people, the smaller we made it."*

If God had given the task of mission to the Coke company it would probably be done by now!
But he didn't. He gave it to the Church!

And we have picked it up and we are running with it.....?????. Any visitor to church on Sunday morning; any fly on the wall in the Vicar's study; any cursory glance at the parish accounts; any observer at a Standing Committee or Vestry Meeting will see immediately how committed we are to the task entrusted to us?

Actually there *is* so much to give thanks to God for within the Diocese – we are bucking the trend of the rest of the Anglican Church, which is in numerical freefall, and are holding our own. For the second year in a row, for example, the numbers of those attending worship in this Diocese has increased. This must not be an excuse for complacency.

God *didn't* give the task of mission to the Coke Company. He gave it to the Church – expecting that a post-Pentecost, resurrection people would have a thousand times more fire in their belly for the challenge and the vision than that of a multi-national company selling a sugary drink.

And for a start they did.

From the very beginning they were a missionary Church – a Church with a mission to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and to reveal the truth and grace and the life of the Kingdom of God. They were willing to die for this faith.

Am I? Are we?

As a Diocese we are committed to this orthodox faith – and I hope we will remain so. We have tried to be intentional and strategic, clearly articulating what we are called to do and how we go about doing it. But there is still something missing.

At this point I need to give just a little background.

Hilary and I have recently returned from Sabbatical, during which we went to the Alpha Leadership conference. It was brilliant – a packed Royal Albert Hall with overflow facilities at Holy Trinity Brompton a few blocks away (which was also full). Two of the speakers were profoundly moving but one turned me upside down. He was a marketing specialist and author – a motivational speaker on leadership.

He said that *‘most leaders and corporations will always start by telling you what they do and how they do it. Very few will tell you (if they even know) **why** they do it.’*

‘However’, he said, ‘exceptional leaders and organisations always start with why. They paint a vision of the future that they are striving to create and how this motivates and inspires them – it’s what gets them up in the morning’.

And then he said that *‘people are drawn to a ‘why’ rather than a ‘what’ and ‘how.’*

The ‘why’ is what gives us the ‘fire in the belly’.

This one talk turned my Sabbatical upside down.

It opened a floodgate of thoughts and emotions as I began to look at the many different aspects of my life and my ministry and ask why.

How clearly, simply and honestly could I answer?

This one session at the conference (and the subsequent workshop that we went to) has deeply impacted me and has made me determined, over the remainder of my time as Bishop, to focus on *why*, rather than *what* and *how*.

I think it offers an answer to that missing something I mentioned a few moments ago. If I reflect this onto our church’s mission and ministry I believe that every single parish could tell us *what* it is that they do. Many have a clear mission statement that does exactly that. Some are even more strategic and can define *how* they intend to go about achieving the what. These parishes, by the way, are all growing!

If you asked me, for example, **what** our mission is, I’d probably refer you to the Great Commission of Matthew 28 and tell you that what we are called to do is make disciples. If you asked me **how** we do what we do, I might try and describe how Jesus disciplined the twelve, or how Paul mentored Timothy and how we are building an intentional mentoring programme around this model. So, I could give you the *‘what’* and *‘how’* of mission, but there is that even more important question, either overlooked or ignored, and that is, *‘Why!’* Why Mission? Why are we doing what we do?

Again I could answer by going back to the Great Commission and say, “because Jesus commanded it”. Sounds a bit more like a sense of duty rather than a motivating fire in the belly. Or I could draw your attention to Luke 10 and say that we do Mission because we follow the example of Jesus who sent 72 followers out in pairs to visit every town where he was about to go.

They are valid and biblical answers to the question of why we do mission and may lead some of you to get inspired and involved in supporting the Church’s mission. But as I began to

wrestle with this question in my own life and ministry I was drawn back to another verse that gives a much simpler answer to this question and leads to a broader, more expansive foundation for our mission and ministry – one little verse from Luke’s gospel that has become profoundly significant for me over these past weeks.

Luke 19:41 – *‘As he (Jesus) approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it.’*

It is a verse that comes directly after what the Bible describes as ‘The triumphal entrance into Jerusalem,’ and immediately before he drives out the money changes from the temple.

Jesus wasn’t weeping because of what he knew he would experience – the arrest, the trial, the abandonment, death.

He was weeping over Jerusalem.

Here in front of him is the city that had been created to the glory of God. It was a city glorified in the Psalms. Psalm 122, for example -

Psalm 122

*I rejoiced with those who said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD.”
Our feet are standing
in your gates, O Jerusalem.*

*Jerusalem is built like a city
that is at unity in itself.
That is where the tribes go up—
the tribes of the LORD—
to praise the name of the LORD.....*

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
“May those who love you be secure.
May there be peace within your walls
and security within your citadels.”*

A city exalted by the prophets -
Isaiah 2:3

*Many people will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from **Jerusalem**.*

It was God’s plan that Jerusalem be a light to the nations all around it because of the peace and the joy of those who lived there under the shadows of His wings.

But that’s not what Jesus saw as he looked down over the city. He saw a city that, politically, was under the rule of Rome - a pagan empire that was in its last stages of decay (with assassinations at the highest level). He saw a city that, spiritually, was led by a ‘religious elite’ who were appointed by Rome: Priests who lived an incredibly lavish lifestyle through the

temple taxes they imposed on people. And Pharisees, who, in Jesus' own words, '*give God a tenth of all their mint and other garden herbs but who neglect justice and the love of God.*'

Jesus wept as he looked over the city.

In the midst of his tears he said, *If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes.*'

This was not new for Jesus. In Mark chapter 6, his heart ached with compassion when he saw the crowd approaching him because they 'looked like sheep without a shepherd'. He wept with Mary at the death of her brother Lazarus. He groaned in his love for the rich young ruler who turned his back on Jesus and walked away, and he wept as he rode into Jerusalem when he saw how far the city had fallen. Jesus could have turned his back on the city when he looked down over it – gone back the way he had come – but he didn't. He continued on into the city – into betrayal, arrest and crucifixion.

Why?

Because '*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, **but to save the world through Him.***'

We look out over God's beautiful creation and see the exploitation, degradation, manipulation, starvation, isolation, sexualisation, polarisation and pollution.

Do we weep as Jesus wept?

How do we respond?

A few weeks ago as I was putting the first thoughts of this message down on paper terrible winds were causing damage in the lower North Island and heavy snow was trapping travellers and isolating communities throughout the north and south islands - Kaikoura was once again cut off. And yet over in Nelson we were sheltered from all of it – no wind, no rain, and no snow just a lovely peaceful day.

I found myself wondering if this is a reflection of the church - a nice little Sunday thing that offers an oasis of peace from the storms that rage all around us: a place of shelter rather than a place of challenge. I certainly think that, at the institutional level, it's a church that spends so much time and energy majoring on the minors while the world is going to hell in a handcart!

For example, in October of 1917, in St Petersburg, Lenin began his Bolshevik uprising that led to the Russian revolution. In the same week, 500 miles away in Moscow, the Orthodox Church was locked in bitter debate over what liturgical colour to wear. The Russian Orthodox Church had become totally unaware of, or irrelevant to, or isolated from, what was happening in the world beyond them, that they had lost the ability or the opportunity to make a difference. They don't seem to have been weeping for their nation.

The Church no longer has a privileged position within society from which it can influence public opinion. Not in terms of our words or our public press releases. Simple words and official statements are not enough to address the huge issues facing God's world and our humanity – global warming for example. Humanity's lust for more – Western greed – has seen us pollute the atmosphere to such an extent that global warming is a reality that we now have to live with. We can lobby for reduction in carbon emissions but the damage has

already been done; sea levels are rising, climate patterns are changing and storms will continue to grow in strength and we will see the extremes of cold, wet and heat increasing.

We can't address global warming unless we address the issue of human greed. And we can't address human greed without the transformation of the human heart. I wish Paul had added this to his command in Romans that we 'be transformed by the renewing of your mind' *and your heart*. Human greed has polluted our waterways and turned our oceans into lakes of plastic and its human greed that stops us addressing poverty in the world.

And putting a can of coke in the hands of every person isn't going to cut it!

In the time I have been talking tonight - around 15 minutes – 90 people will have died from starvation: six people every single minute and most of them would have been children. And yet new research from the States (for example) shows that almost a half of all US food produce is thrown away because it is not perfect – it is blemished in some way. The environmental protection agency says that discarded food is the single biggest component in US landfills and incinerators – 60 million tons of food every year. The volume might be different here, but the reality is the same.

The Old Testament prophets would tell us that God weeps over his world just as Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Through his tears, Jesus continued the journey into Jerusalem - to the cross which, as John's Gospel tells us, is not the place of God's judgement, but of God's redemption of the world.

And it is still the only answer to the problems facing our world. But are we willing to be part of the answer by the way we live the faith we proclaim?

Sadly there is a new religion rapidly growing in the West that fills the gap left by a declining Christianity. It is a religion that reflects the values of this emerging society. It is very attractive because it has no shape, no churches, no structure, and no commitment. In this new religion everything centres on the individual – the individual who has become the centre of the universe – everything revolves around 'me'. Individual rights and freedoms are the symbols of the new worship. Food and sex have become, within this religion, the ultimate spiritual experiences. And the acquisition of things has become the sign of our 'blessing.'

Are we aware of how the tentacles of this new faith have crept into Western Christianity – and into our homes, our families, our marriages....?

As I asked myself the 'why' question, I found the answer, for me, in this little verse that I have teased out tonight. And the more I have reflected on it during these past weeks, the more convinced I am that its only when we find ourselves weeping for the world – and for the Church – that we discover the focus, the motivation (and the passion) to make a difference.

As the Diocese of Nelson we'll continue to speak into the issues that confront us. But more effective than any words, will be the lives we live and the example of our communities of faith; our parishes.

What would happen if:

- In a world of greed, followers of Jesus chose to live simply.
- In a world that takes we chose to give.
- In a world of increasing sectarianism and hatred we modelled forgiveness and love.
- In a world that is in sexual crisis we lived lives of purity and holiness.
- In a world of gender confusion, we lived as daughters and sons of a loving Father – made perfectly in his image.
- In a world of increasing isolation and loneliness, we built authentically welcoming communities of care.
- In a world of abortion and euthanasia, we embraced those most vulnerable – the very young and the very old - as integral members of our body.
- In a world that increasingly dehumanises people who are different from us, we acknowledge the intrinsic value of each person and our common humanity.
- In a world of bitterness and anger we radiate mercy and grace.
- In a world where people live in shame we offer freedom.
- In a world that is lost we celebrate Jesus.
- In a world without hope we glorify God.

It all begins with our answer to the question, 'WHY.'

John Sculley, had risen to the top of the game as youngest President of Pepsi Cola. In 1983 Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple Computer attempted to recruit the 38 year old Sculley away from Pepsi by issuing a tremendous challenge to him, He asked: "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?"

I hope and pray that this Diocese might have the passion and the clarity of vision to offer and to respond to this same challenge – because God so loved the world!