

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2004 at 11.30am

Welcome

**Praise:** Great is thy faithfulness (GTG 12)

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Micah 6:6-8

Announcements

League of Church Loyalty Prizes

**Children's Praise:** God's love is deeper (Children Leave)

Offering and Dedication of Offering

**Committed to the wider world (1)** 'Its Contemporary Issues'

**Praise:** King of Kings, Majesty (MP 1000)

**Committed to the wider world (2)**

Scripture Reading: Matt.25: 31-46

'Its Cries for Practical Help'

Prayer

**Praise:** You are merciful to me (Source 593)

**Committed to the wider world (3)**

Scripture Reading: Matt.28: 16-20

'It's urgent need to hear the Gospel'

Intro

Dalzell Update and Prayer: Mrs. Anne McCully

**Praise:** Take my life (Hy. 462/Source 468)

**Benediction**

**A People committed to the wider world, with its contemporary issues, its cries for practical help, and its urgent need to hear the Gospel of Christ.**

What's the connection between this (Daily Newspaper) and this (Bible)?

Should we really expect there to be a significant connection between what was written for consumption in yesterday's paper, and what was originally written for consumption in the ancient Bible world of 2000 or 3000+ years ago?

Put it another way, if you found yourself reviewing the papers on Breakfast News, would it or should it be possible to analyse the stories making the headlines in terms of Bible teaching and principles? Does our Christian Faith help us to think about the contemporary issues of the wider world in which we live? Should it?

Think of some of the current headline issues: Kidnappings in Iraq; proposed reforms to GCSE and A Levels; the US race for the Whitehouse; the Government's proposals to reform gambling laws; the continued threat of famine in parts of Africa etc etc. Should Christian people be actively interested in issues like these? Should they have a view on them? does their Christian Faith need to shape their views?

Well, this green card which summarises Our Calling, both as individual Christians and as a Church together, says that we are to be *a people committed to the wider world, with its contemporary issues, its cries for practical help, and its urgent need to hear the Gospel of Christ.*

**Committed** to the wider world – this is a fairly strong way of putting it – not just *interested* in the wider world outside our own personal lives, but **committed** – caring about what happens, having a view about the issues, wanting to make some kind of difference in our world, in our day.

Is that the right way to see things? **Should** Christians be committed to the wider world in that sort of way?

But the Bible, itself, seems to tell us that it is a book for the real world, with important things to say about the wider world in which we live our everyday lives – and things to tell us about how we should contribute to life in that wider world.

Did you hear how the OT prophet, Micah, put it in what we read: *He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*

To me, ‘*To act justly and to love mercy*’ sounds like living that has to do with engaging with real people in the real world, as an essential part of walking humbly with God – attitudes, lifestyles, relationships in the everyday life of the wider world - just like Jesus emphasised that we were to love the Lord our God with all our heart .... And our neighbour as ourselves – and loving neighbours is about being committed to the wider world.

And we could open up almost any book of the Bible and back up that point – from the OT teaching about this whole wider world being God’s creation, right through to its central affirmation that God became part of this wider world when Jesus came to live in it.

God is clearly committed to the wider world, and therefore it seems right to say that his people should be so too.

And that it is not right to say that ‘Faith’ is essentially a personal and private matter; or that ‘Church Life’ and ‘Everyday Life’ are 2 fairly separate compartments of life.

And even though there is always the danger that the wider world may try to make us conform to its ways and values, that is not a reason for the Christian failing to engage with the wider world.

God’s Word, the Bible, has much to say about the real issues of the wider world, and Christian people need to be serious about a commitment to this wider world that is shaped and inspired by the Bible teaching – commitment that takes seriously its *contemporary issues, its cries for practical help and its urgent need to hear the Gospel of Christ.*

The German, Professor Karl Barth, was probably the most famous Protestant theologian of the 20th century, and he is reputed to have said that Christians should have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, as we try to live as Christians in our world.

Christians of other days have certainly seen it and done it that way – the second part of the 1700's and the early part of the 1800's saw a great resurgence of Biblical Christianity called 'the Evangelical Revival' – and not only were people converted to Christ and churches renewed, but it inspired many of those Christians to take up all kinds of causes in the wider world of their day – Wilberforce's determination to oppose the slave trade and Lord Shaftsbury's campaigns to do something about the plight of child workers in factories and mines, and others who became involved in the reform of prison conditions, the establishment of wider educational opportunities etc.

So, with the Bible in our right hand, and the newspaper in our left, we should be both inspired, and guided, about involvement with and commitment to the wider world of our day.

Of course we'll not solve all the problems – we'd be foolish to think so!

Of course we need, always, to remember that 'man does not live by bread alone', and that therefore he needs to be 'saved for eternal life' as well as helped for practical life.

Of course we need to be careful that when we get involved in the wider world, that it doesn't start to influence our way of thinking more than the Bible and our Christian Faith.

Of course, we have to recognise that with some of these difficult issues, equally committed Christian people will arrive at contrasting conclusions.

But, having said all that, we are to be a *people committed to the wider world, with its contemporary issues, its cries for practical help, and its urgent need to hear the Gospel of Christ.*

If you've been part of the 'Get a Life' groups, you may have noticed the idea that Knock Presb. Church use in their services occasionally. It's called *Window on the World* – where they take an issue from the news, and spend a few moments trying to work out how they should think about that issue as Christians. I thought we could try that today. I wanted to pick something that is very topical, where people have different views, and where we might not be completely sure what we should think as Christians. So I picked the topic of Animal Rights - it's a bit of a 'real live issue' isn't it! Just remind yourself of the currently very heated debate about Hunting and its probable complete ban. Or just recently the item on the news about a grave in Yorkshire that had been desecrated by animal rights protesters who objected to the deceased's connection with breeding animals for medical experiments.

What, if anything, does the Bible say about these issues? Can it give us any help to get our thinking right?

Obviously we don't have time to deal with it thoroughly – enough for the purposes of today to ask ourselves this question: Where would we begin to look in the Bible to get started in our thinking?

I think that the most obvious place to look, and probably the right place, would be the Bible's teaching about Creation. Let me try to sum up some of its most important teaching:

a) **Animals have a high place in God's Creation:** When we read the Genesis accounts, it seems as if God adds each stage of creation, gradually working up to the most important parts: – and so on the 5<sup>th</sup> day, it says, God created fish and birds, followed by all kinds of livestock. The animal world is clearly given a very prominent and important place in creation – and that emphasis carries on throughout Scripture, not least in Psalms like 50:10 *for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains and the creatures of the field are mine.* And to that, we might add Jesus words about our

heavenly Father feeding the birds of the air, and not even a sparrow falling to the ground without God noticing and caring.

**b) People have a high responsibility for animals in God's Creation.**

*Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground* (Gen1:28) – and it is generally agreed nowadays that ‘rule’ carries the idea of being a careful steward of the animal world, being responsible for, looking after God’s creation – not simply using it and exploiting it for our own benefit. God is described, if your like, as the Owner of the Creation, and we are put in charge as the ‘Managers’ on his behalf. So that brings a very definite sense of responsibility for the animal well-being or ‘rights’.

**c) In God's Creation, human beings have the highest and distinctively special place.**

Having created everything else, including the animal world, Genesis 1 says, Then God said, *Let us make man in our own image ...* And later on when it came to giving the man a partner for life it says that from *among all the animals no suitable helper was found* – there was something different and distinctive about human beings – he needed to relate to other human beings in a way that was not possible with animals, and further, he was made to relate to God in ways that animals were not.

Now we could spend several sermons teasing out what those 3 general points mean – but even at that simple level, lets try to draw out what they mean for us as we try to think about the contemporary issue of Animal Rights, from a Christian point of view.

i) Surely they tell us immediately, and fairly well beyond dispute, that Christians, who recognise the wonder of God’s creation should be committed to the well-being and protection of the animal world. How could it be otherwise if we want to honour its Creator? So Christians will be concerned about, and opposed to, any and every situation of cruelty to animals – and that might

influence our views when it comes to the hunting issue or to the unnecessary use of animals in experiments.

ii) But secondly, we would need to take seriously the fact that the Bible almost certainly puts animals in an important but subordinate position to human beings – there is a critical distinction in their status in God’s created world, and there is a clear sense that the animal world is given for people’s benefit. Therefore, most Christians take the view, which I share, that animals are to be farmed, and that animal products, including meat are for eating – although I recognise the vegetarian conscience of some Christian people.

iii) Finally for now, if we accept that God made human beings to be different from animals, and if he made human beings to relate to him and to each other in a way that animals do not, then I think that we have to be very careful about putting human rights and needs on exactly the same level as animal rights. They aren’t the same – human life has a sanctity and an eternal significance that animal life does not have. We mustn’t confuse animal rights with human rights, as some of the animal rights organisations have done – where they have threatened human life and liberty in the name of defending animal life and liberty.

Now we are only skimming this topic – but maybe there is enough to get you thinking about it, in particular, and about the way in which our Biblical faith should help us think about contemporary issues.

**Praise:** Having been reminded that this whole world is God’s – he is its Creator and is Sovereign over all its issues and affairs, we sing: *King of Kings, Majesty, God of heaven living in me.*

**(2) A People committed to the wider world, with its contemporary issues, its cries for practical help, and its urgent need to hear the Gospel of Christ.**

Compared to our first point today, this one is straightforward – We cannot miss Jesus’ point in Matt.25. He speaks about people who are hungry and thirsty, people who are strangers and refugees, people who are destitute, people who are sick, people who are in prison ... and he probably means us to keep adding to that list in terms of all the other situations of human need and suffering that we can think of: *I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me ... or you did not do for me!*

Now, of course, he did not mean that by responding to people’s cries for practical help we are able to please God and pass God’s test for heaven. The whole Gospel tells us that we are saved by grace; it is the gift of God. So we must never think that even if we aren’t so much into ‘religion’ we can make up for it by humanitarian caring and service.

However, what this parable does mean is that true trusting in Christ as Saviour, will make us into people who care about the cries for practical help that surround us in life. If that caring concern and practical is absent it raises very serious questions about our faith.

So, we are to be people who are committed to the wider world in terms of its many and varied cries for practical help – even when we have doubts and wonder if what we give or what we do is making any significant difference. Because we hear, because we care, because we have some of the necessary resources, we are to do something.

So we don’t need to say a lot on this section – rather, we need to do a lot! As some of you already do.

So all I intend to say for now is to mention a few of the opportunities that arise through our church life:

- Tear Fund and Christian Aid, to which many of us

contribute annually. Have you ever considered taking out an on-going direct debit, which helps organisations like these to have a much steadier income.

- Blythswood Care, about which we will have an opportunity to learn at the United Midweek next Wednesday.
- The Presbyterian Orphan and Children's Society whose regular grants are a significant help in homes where one or both parents are no longer there. Would such help not make collecting for a couple of hours worthwhile?

**3. So, a People committed to the wider world, with its contemporary issues, its cries for practical help, and its urgent need to hear the Gospel of Christ.**

Earlier on, when we were stressing that Christians should be interested in, and committed to, the contemporary issues of everyday life in the wider world, we carefully reminded ourselves that '*man does not live by bread alone*' – that he is quite different from the rest of creation because God made him, *in his own image* and intended human beings to relate to him in a special way. As the Bible progresses, it develops this idea in terms of men and women having an eternal dimension – they are made for eternal life as well as this life.

And this is the framework for understanding the words of Jesus that we've just read – his Great Commission – that his disciples should do everything they can and go everywhere they could to give everyone they meet the good news of the trusting in Jesus Christ: *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* – ie.

Teaching them the way of Christian faith and trust and hope.

And to that Great Commission, we might add the 'the Great Call' in Romans 10: *Everone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved .....but how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?* (Rom. 10)

So the Church is to be a people committed to the task of helping people to hear the Gospel of Christ, with its eternal hope for their

lives – and that might be the challenge for us about the person who lives next door or who lives on the far side of the world.

i) Read the latest issue of the **United Appeal Briefing** that is in your pew today, in order to find out about some of what PCI is doing in our name and with our support.

ii) And as we finish, let's also be encouraged and challenged by what the Dalzells are doing, as Anne McCully takes a moment or two to bring us up to date.

### **Prayer**

As we go home today thinking about being a people committed to the wider world, with its contemporary issues, its cries for practical help, and its urgent need to hear the Gospel of Christ, there's not really a better hymn to sum up our sentiments than:

*Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee*

Screen 1 (Put up during the Offering, but close for Prayer of Dedication)

*A people committed to the wider world, with its contemporary issues, its cries for practical help, and its urgent need to hear the Gospel of Christ.*

Screen 2 ( At marked point on sermon text, page 1)

*A people committed to the wider world*

**1. Its contemporary Issues**

Screen 3 ( When we reach Animal Rights section of point1)

**Animal Rights in God's Creation**

- a) Animals have a high place in God's Creation
- b) People have a high responsibility for animals in god's Creation.
- c) In God's Creation, human beings have the highest and distinctively special place.

Screen 4 (Point 2 on Order of Service)

*A people committed to the wider world*

**2. Its cries for practical help.**

Screen 5 (Point 3 on Order of Service)

*A people committed to the wider world*

**3. Its urgent need to hear the Gospel of Christ.**

Screen 6 (Conclusion of Sermon)

*A people committed to the wider world, with its contemporary issues, its cries for practical help, and its urgent need to hear the Gospel of Christ.*