

People need saving

Perhaps like me you heard the story in the media just after Christmas of how a chat with a stranger at a party saved Manoly Viravong's life.

The mother of two, who had been waiting for a kidney transplant for five years, struck up a conversation with Veronica Buttigieg, a friend of a friend she had never spoken to before.

The talk turned to health and Mrs Viravong's disappointment that her brother had decided against donating one of his kidneys to her. But Mrs Buttigieg did more than just politely sympathise. Over the clink of glasses and chatter of the other guests, she made an amazing offer.

'Why not have one of my kidneys?', she asked.

Two months later, the operation took place and Mrs Viravong is well on the way to recovery.

Now change the scenario a bit and at a party and in conversation someone says to you that they have never really thought about Jesus, over the clink of glasses and chatter of the other guests, do you make them an amazing offer or do you remain silent?

Veronica Buttigieg offered Manoly Viravong life what about you and me do we offer people life and eternal life at that?

Over the next 15 months, as a church, we are going to be focussing on evangelism as we lead up to a mission in March 2013.

1. What

Let me explain what I mean by that.

By evangelism I mean a sharing of our faith in Jesus Christ which can be done in many ways but which centre on the message of the gospel. By mission I mean a short period where we hold a series of events large and small at which that gospel message is presented to people who have been invited. In our case we will be helped in this by a team from Oak Hill theological college.

2. Why

Some I am sure will ask but why are we doing this?

The answer in short is that this is what we are called to do. It was the command of Jesus to his disciples. Let me remind you from Lifeshapes of the triangle. The triangle is about a balanced church. With the "up" dimension we continue to grow in our worship of God, hearing and obeying his word. With the "in" dimension we, under God, grow in maturity as we seek to follow Christ in every way, walking worthy of the calling we have received. We do this encouraging each other onwards in Christ. With the "out" dimension we seek to point others to Jesus and help them to come to faith. Now over the last few years we have I believe focussed on our up with our continued emphasis on the Bible, prayer and worship. We have focussed on the in and I spent the best part of a year meeting individually with people looking at our spiritual life. However in doing all this I feel the out

aspect of our life as a church has suffered. There are a number of things that make me think this one being that this time last year when we had a Christianity Explored course there was just one person from outside the church invited.

So I and others in the leadership team feel we need to give time and thought to this aspect of our life as a church. I am aware that the out element is not just preaching the faith and that there are many involved in different ways out there in the community, however, I am equally aware that we are called to speak the gospel. I would also want us to note that a mission is not the totality of this task of evangelism. Indeed it can be a distraction because once done we can feel we have done our bit for the gospel now let's get back to normal, whereas we need to be reminded that sharing our faith is part of daily life just as prayer and the Bible and worship should be part of our daily life. Evangelism is part of the life of a balanced Christian life and a balanced church and more it is the way we as a church remain alive and growing.

3. Why

But having said all this some will still say but why? Why should we as individuals and as a church be looking outward and why should we be sharing our faith? Well there are many reasons and in our sermons over the next six weeks we are going to look at six of them. We share faith because it changes people, because God loves people, because of God's patience, because of Christ's call, because it is of great value and this week because people need saving.

Let me ask do you believe that? Do you believe that people who are not followers of Jesus need saving?

Jesus thought so for, as we will see more next week, having brought Zacchaeus to faith he said, "Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

And we read why Jesus came very clearly in John 3:16-17, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall 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."

Paul also thought so. He suffered so much that people should hear the good news of God's love and salvation in Jesus Christ because he was convinced that people needed saving.

Just look with me if you would at the passage we have had read today, Romans 3:9-26.

See the plight of humanity v9, "all are under sin" that is everyone Jew and Gentile alike has sinned, has rebelled against God, there is no exception and as Paul has been showing in the previous verses there is no excuse. So v10 "there is no one righteous not even one", v20 "no one will be declared righteous" that is no one can stand before God and v23 "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

What Paul was saying in these verses is that there is no human being who can stand before God and say I am worthy to be allowed into your presence. Everyone of us has rebelled against God, every one of us falls short of God's glory, that is we were made in the image or glory of God but have failed to live up to it. Now if that were the end of it we might say "ah well not to worry" but that is not the end. All have sinned and as a result v19 "the whole world held accountable to God." We all face the judgement and wrath of God. That was why Jesus came to rescue people from the wrath of God, Romans 3:23-25, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement (that is a propitiation which removes God's wrath), through faith in his blood." Christ died to rescue humanity from the wrath of God. Paul suffered that people might hear and know of that rescue. It is that important. People need saving. Why should we share our faith, because without the gospel, the message of God's saving love in Jesus, people are destined to face the judgement of God and for an eternity shut out of the presence of God.

Such was the motivation of Paul, as he wrote in 1 Cor 9:22, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." His motivation was somehow to save some from the fate that being without Jesus Christ condemned them to.

Down the centuries others have followed Paul's steps.

CT Studd a missionary to China in the late 19th century once said, "Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

It is said of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, whose very title gives the game away, that he was stung into wholehearted Christian service by a sceptic who said, "If I believed what you Christians believe I would not rest day or night from telling people about it."

James Hudson Taylor again a great missionary to China once spoke at a Conference in Perth Scotland. He told how "he was travelling by native junk from Shanghai to Ningpo. Among his fellow-passengers, one Chinese, who had spent some years in England and went by the name of Peter . Nearing the city of Sungkiang, they were preparing to go ashore together, when Taylor in his cabin was startled by a sudden splash and cry that told of a man overboard. Springing at once on deck he looked round and missed Peter.

'Yes,' exclaimed the boatmen unconcernedly, 'it was over there he went down!'

To drop the sail and jump into the water was the work of a moment. Taylor caught sight of some fishermen with a drag-net - just the thing needed.

'Come,' he cried as hope revived, 'come and drag over this spot. A man is drowning!'

'*Veh bin,*' was the amazing reply: 'It is not convenient.'

'Don't talk of convenience! Quickly come, or it will be too late.'

'We are busy fishing.'

'Never mind your fishing! Come - only come *at once!* I will pay you well.'

'How much will you give us?'

'Five dollars! only don't stand talking. Save life without delay!'

'Too little!' they shouted across the water. 'We will not come for less than thirty dollars.'

'But I have not so much with me! I will give you all I've got.'

'And how much may that be?'

'Oh, I don't know. About fourteen dollars.' Upon this they came, and the first time they passed the net through the water brought up the missing man. But all Taylor's efforts to restore respiration were in vain. It was only too plain that life had fled, sacrificed to the callous indifference of those who might easily have saved it.

A burning sense of indignation swept over his audience...but as he went on the conviction struck home all the more deeply, "We condemn those heathen fishermen. We say that they are guilty of a man's death because they could easily have saved him and did not do it. But what of the millions whom we leave to perish and that eternally.""

Why should you share your faith, why should I because people need saving.

4. What

So what should we do?

We firstly I think we should **REFLECT** upon God's word and our response to it.

Do we see what Jesus saw, what Paul saw what James Hudson Taylor saw, that people need saving.

As you look at members of your family, people at work, people you pass in the street do you see them as people needing salvation – do you? If you do reflect upon how seriously you are taking this.

But secondly I feel now is a time for us all to **PRAY**.

To pray about **our attitude** to those who are living their lives in rebellion against Christ. Pray that we will have a heart which longs to see people come to Christ, a heart which sees people in their need.

Pray **for people** you wish to see come to faith. Perhaps you are already doing it if not can I make a suggestion that you write down on a sheet of paper the names of two or three people that you would like to see come to faith and pray daily for them. Many of the national Missions that have taken place with people like Billy Graham and Luis Palau encouraged people to have small prayer cards with two or three names on and then for people to meet in prayer triplets to pray together for those people .

Pray that we might **be sensitive** to opportunities that occur that is opportunities to invite friends to things at Christ Church but even more opportunities to speak to your friends about Jesus and pray

that you would be willing and able to take those opportunities so that at the party when someone says to you that they have never really thought about Jesus, over the clink of glasses and chatter of the other guests, you are able to make them an amazing offer or at least say something about God's love in Jesus.

Pray for **the team** from Christ Church who will be organising the mission and our preparations towards the mission.

We have the amazing gift of life in the gospel and we are surrounded by people who need saving may God by his Spirit stir us to see how we can offer life to those who need it.