

Mission 1:  
*Church Deep and Wide*

Sermon

*Hobart, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015*

*Devonport, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015*

*Launceston, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015*

### **John 20:19-23**

<sup>19</sup> That Sunday evening\* the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said. <sup>20</sup> As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!

<sup>21</sup> Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” <sup>22</sup> Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”<sup>1</sup>

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\* Greek *In the evening of that day, the first day of the week.*

<sup>1</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 20:19-23). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

## INTRODUCTION:

### I. ONE OF THE DANGERS FOR US AS A CHURCH, AND AS CHRISTIANS

#### 1. Is to become self-centred

- a) To become religious, focused exclusively on right teaching and our individual salvation and personal benefits

#### 2. John McLean wrote about this recently in an article entitled, *Deep Church*

- a) He talked about how we can end up with various shallower and narrower aberrations of what the body of Christ is intended to be;

So it's easy to condescend to church – **Mere-Church** – as a dysfunctional group of people who are sometimes judgmental, frequently boring and often apparently hypocritical. The church clearly has lots of weaknesses, faults and problems. It often fails to live up to its high calling. So, why bother?

Much easier to do **Me-Church**. Just me and God. With no one else to spoil it. No one else to put up with, be patient with, serve, be gracious to, or just plain tolerate. Just me and God, who loves me in spite of everything I do (or don't do). I can just sing the hymns I want to. Or not sing at all, if that is my prejudice. Sorry, preference.

Clearly, the Pentecost notion of church flies in the face of individualism, let alone hyper-individualism. C.S. Lewis coined the phrase **Deep Church**, which gets at understanding church from the inside, at the often hidden spiritual structures beneath the surface of things. There is always more going on than we see. We never see the church whole and complete. Deep church captures the concept of the Trinitarian realities at work from which the church is formed, from which your congregation draws life.<sup>2</sup>

### B. SO CLEARLY THE CHURCH IS NOT TO BE SHALLOW

#### 1. Not to be **Mere church** just bumbling along as a bunch of religious misfits

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<sup>2</sup> John McLean, *Deep Church*, Life Together, [http://www.gci.org.au/home/media/articles/deep\\_church.aspx](http://www.gci.org.au/home/media/articles/deep_church.aspx)

2. It is not to be ***Me-church***

a) Self-centred, consumerist, give me peace and salvation, and make me righteous,

3. The concept of ***Deep church*** by way of contrast moves us to the deep realities of who God is

a) The truths that go beyond the surface and focus on the true and deep realities of God and life as his people in Christ, through the Spirit dwelling in us

4. But even then we can too easily be caught up focusing on those truths and realities and how they relate to us as individuals, or as the church

a) We can end up being deep, but narrow in that deepness, and reverting back to *Me-church*

**C. TODAY WE ARE STARTING A SERIES ON MISSION**

1. As we are going to see in John 20, Jesus sent his disciples, he gave them a mission

2. In John 20:21 he said; As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

a) Let's take some time to consider that mission and its importance to each of us as individuals, to our congregation and to the church everywhere

**D. PRAYER**

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## BODY:

### II. JOHN 20:19-23 SENT CHURCH

#### A. JOHN 20 TELLS US ABOUT THE EVENTS FOLLOWING JESUS' RESURRECTION

1. How Mary Magdalene had found the empty tomb, and brought Peter and probably John to see it
2. Then after the two disciples had left, Jesus appeared to Mary who was still at the tomb weeping and then sent Mary to tell the others of his resurrection
3. The disciples were gathered in fear in an upper room in Jerusalem, hiding, fearful, locked away from the threatening world outside
  - a) Cut off from world

<sup>19</sup> That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders.

4. It is amazing to consider how from this frozen, afraid and closed, self-focused bunch ended up being the ones God sent out into the world, to love and reach out to all people everywhere with the gospel

#### B. WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM, AND THROUGH THEM IS A WONDERFUL INSIGHT INTO HOW THE FATHER, SON AND SPIRIT DESIRE TO AND ARE ABLE TO WORK WITH US,

1. The people of God, the body of Christ, the Church — today, and always
2. In our western nations, in this Post-Christian era, it is easy to become discouraged by the lack of growth in our churches

3. But as Ross Hastings points out in his book, *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West*,

No matter how dark things may seem, the church will never be in a worse state than that described in John 20:19, pre-Jesus...<sup>3</sup>

4. He points out that the optimism we can draw from what happened with them and the growth of the early church, rests above all;

...on the triune God of grace who still inhabits that church despite its beleaguered state, and is at work in the world through it to bring to completion the new creation Christ has inaugurated.<sup>4</sup>

5. He goes on to describe the state they were in before the resurrected Jesus appeared;

The “before” picture of this group of disciples, this microcosm of the church, is of a motley crew of notable failures. They had ministered effectively alongside Jesus for three years and their level of competence toward the end of that season had led some of them to think they might even sit in close proximity to Jesus in his coming kingdom. However, then came the trial and the cross. They failed miserably, to a man. Even postresurrection, they were in a pretty sorry state, so far unconvinced for the most part by the sight of an empty tomb, and the claims of Mary Magdalene that she had seen him.

Sad though their chauvinism or jealousy may have been, this only magnifies the amazing grace of Christ who appeared to them on Easter Sunday evening despite all.<sup>5</sup>

6. Hastings describes their grief riddled numbness and fear and goes on to show how their location behind closed doors graphically portrayed their powerlessness.

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<sup>3</sup> *Missional God, Missional Church: Hope for Re-Evangelizing the West*, Inter-Varsity Press, 2012, p.20

<sup>4</sup> Hastings, p.20

<sup>5</sup> Hastings, p.20

Most importantly, the total situation of the first disciples as John describes it—in a room behind locked doors for fear of the Jewish leaders of that day—is, I believe, a metaphor for their powerless state.”<sup>6</sup>

7. He quotes a commentator who wrote that;

The extent of their terror and the disquiet caused by such an atrocity had simultaneously locked the house and the hearts of the disciples.<sup>7</sup>

8. Hastings goes on to add;

This infant microcosm of the church hadn’t a prayer where world evangelism is concerned. They would have been voted the group of human beings “most unlikely to start a new world religion.” They certainly could offer little by way of shalom, simply because they were experiencing none.<sup>8</sup>

**C. SHALOM, OR TRUE PEACE AND WHOLENESS, WAS WHAT THEY DESPERATELY NEEDED, AND WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS AS WELL.**

1. And they received it, just as we and all mankind can, from the resurrected Jesus.

**John 20:19-23**

<sup>19</sup> That Sunday evening\* the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said. <sup>20</sup> As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! <sup>21</sup> Again he said, “Peace be with you.”

2. This peace, as we have discussed before, lies at the heart of who God is, and at the heart of the good news the disciples desperately needed

a) Once they had the peace that is Christ with us—and in us, today and forever—they were enabled to share that good news, that peace, that presence of Christ in our life and our world, with others

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<sup>6</sup> Hastings, p.20

<sup>7</sup> Chrysologus, quoted in Hastings, p.20

<sup>8</sup> Hastings, p.20-21

\* Greek *In the evening of that day, the first day of the week.*

b) And thus the Church began at Pentecost

### 3. Hastings describes this miraculous transformation, the “after” picture.

The “after” picture... is another story altogether! The difference is made by Jesus’ presence in their midst. There was shock at first. The sudden presence of Jesus in their midst might have been a little hard to process!

...By the time this occasion was over and the disciple had calmed down, they really might have begun to believe that mission was possible.

The picture John paints here of that little shell-shocked gathering, with the risen Jesus standing in the center, imparting his shalom and then inspiring them with the greatest of all commissions—mission as participation in God’s mission—is evocative of what the church can be in every era of its existence as it once again makes the risen Christ the center.

After the day of Pentecost when they actually received what Jesus symbolically conferred on them here, the Holy Spirit, they would in fact accomplish the impossible—the evangelization of a significant portion of their then-known world. The shalom imparted by the risen Christ this kingdom community was shared with a broken and alienated world. People were drawn into that gathered community of shalom, and the catalytic impact of that scattered community in turn ultimately brought shalom to the ancient and medieval world in all kinds of ways—the liberation of women, the humanization of children, hospitals, education, art, architecture and science.

This little community that began with eleven apostles here and then 120 disciples prior to Pentecost, grew to 5,000 by Acts 4.

Rodney Stark has estimated that the church then grew from around 1,000 in A.D. 40 to 25,000 by A.D. 100 to between 5 and 7.5 million by the start of the fourth century.<sup>9</sup>

### 4. Hastings isn’t suggesting that numbers are to be our focus. But it is inspiring to see what God can do through his Spirit led people when the focus is on him, rather than on ourselves and our own religious self-interest.

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<sup>9</sup> Hastings, p.21



**D. THEOLOGIAN GARY DEDDO SPOKE AT LENGTH AT A RECENT CONFERENCE ABOUT HOW FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE ARE AT THE CENTRE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

1. Because they are at the centre of who God is, the core of his life and being
  - a) The New Testament is full of descriptions of these three traits being at the heart of the life of God that Christ shares with us
2. Peace was also singled out at the conference as being part of life of God that Jesus Christ brings into our lives through the Holy Spirit
3. Peace, or *shalom*, is the setting of wrongs right, restoring relationships and bringing justice and reconciliation, making life the way God intended it from the beginning.

**John 20:21**

<sup>21</sup> Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

**E. THE DISCIPLES WERE CLOSED OFF, CLOSED HEARTED AND FEARFUL, LACKING PEACE, LACKING FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE**

1. But the presence of the resurrected Jesus and his sending of the Holy Spirit changed all that
2. The faith, hope, love and peace that he brought into their lives through that presence, enabled and inspired them to participate in the *sending, peace-making, relationship-restoring* work of God
3. That *sending, peace-making, relationship-restoring* work of God, is what we are focusing on here—it God's ongoing work of mission that the church is to be focused on, inspired by, and dedicated to

### III. DEEP AND WIDE CHURCH

#### A. THIS BRINGS US BACK TO THE CONCEPT OF DEEP CHURCH WE LOOKED AT EARLIER;

1. And to the dangers of Mere-church and of Me-church, including a Me-church version of Deep church
2. Ross Hastings supports the concept of *Deep church*, but emphasizes the importance of understanding “the *missional* nature of the deep church”

3. He suggests;

that missional may in fact be a better term to describe the kind of ecclesiology [study of the nature and function of the church] necessary for such a time as this.... ...deep church is in fact the *wide* church also.<sup>10</sup>

4. He goes on to describe how the wide aspect derives from and enhances deep church.

...even in the deepest of church practices, the church acts for the world of humanity in its holy priesthood, and can never, therefore, forget mission. As holy priests gathered, the church represents the world to God. Furthermore, as holy priests scattered, the church mediates the presence of God into the world, spreading shalom and inviting people into reconciliation with God so that they may become Christian and fully human.

In this *wide* scattered work, the people of God are further deepened as they encounter Christ in the stranger, the prisoner, the poor.

So, depth has width in mind, and width results in depth.

This is the missional church, and in this sense, I propose that *missional* is a better term than *deep* for the church. The missional church is *both deep and wide*.<sup>11</sup>

5. So, finally, let’s look a bit more at what we mean by missional church, and what mission entails.
  - a) We start by looking at who God is.

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<sup>10</sup> Hastings, p.12

<sup>11</sup> Hastings, p.13

## IV. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MISSION?

### A. AS WE READ IN OUR PASSAGE IN JOHN;

#### John 20:21-23

<sup>21</sup> Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."<sup>12</sup>

1. As the Father sent Jesus, Jesus sent them
2. Part of that sending included "sending" the Holy Spirit

### B. SENDING OUT, IS PART OF WHAT GOD DOES

1. It is at the heart of who God is, and is at the centre of what mission is all about
  - a) When we stop to think about who God is—as we see his nature and will revealed through the Scriptures, and ultimately through the life of Jesus the Son—we observe that God is not insular, or self-centred
  - b) From the accounts of creation in Genesis, to the recreation in Revelation, we see how God works to create and works with that which is outside of himself.
  - c) This is the God of love in action.
  - d) This is God's mission
2. The Father, Son and Spirit all work to build relationships with their creation
  - a) Throughout the Old Testament we see how God reached down to build and maintain, and repair and renew relationships with his people
  - b) He never stopped reaching out, he continually sought communication and interaction with his creation
  - c) He sent angels, and prophets and priests to establish and re-establish relationships

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<sup>12</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 20:19-23). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

- d) And ultimately he sent his only son to be one with us, so that we could and would be one in community with him
- 3. So, clearly God is a sending God, an outgoing, missional God
- 4. We see this as well when we look at the life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God sent to be with us
  - a) Jesus continually went to where the people were during his life on earth
  - b) He reached out to them to bring them into communion with himself and the Father through the Spirit
  - c) In turn, Jesus sent out the followers he had reached out to and brought into relationship
  - d) We read in John 20:21 how he commissioned and sent them in a more profound and permanent way

<sup>21</sup> Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

- 5. Through the sending of the Spirit he continued to send, transform and equip these disciples to participate in God's outgoing, loving work of reaching out to and seeking to restore relationships, to bring his lost people back to himself through Christ.
- 6. This included the message of forgiveness

### **John 20:23**

<sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."<sup>13</sup>

### **C. THIS IS TALKING ABOUT THE POWER TO BIND AND LOOSE, TO REMIT OR NOT**

- a) This, according to well known theologian and commentator Alfred Edersheim, amounts to Jesus transferring the powers of the Old Covenant leaders and judges to the apostles.

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<sup>13</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 20:19-23). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

These two powers—the legislative and judicial—which belonged to the Rabbinic office, Christ now transferred...to His Apostles <sup>14</sup>

2. The leaders in Israel didn't ever have the power to forgive. The church today, can only declare the forgiveness of God, the remittance of sins that Jesus has made possible.
3. We also need to remember what sin really is
  - a) Sin is disbelief, distrust, rejection of God and his love, and his seeking to bring us back to relationship with himself
4. In this statement, Jesus was giving the Apostles authority to settle doctrinal and church matters
  - a) The authority to decide on matters of behavior, policy and discipline
  - b) To make binding decisions about including and excluding people from the fellowship
5. And this is what we see happening in the writings of the New Testament
  - a) They applied the teachings of Jesus to the life of the church
  - b) They taught and practiced the grace and reconciling love of God, the way of forgiveness and loving community
  - c) But they also taught and had the authority to make judgments against those things which are against God, and his Triune life of faith, hope, love and peace
  - d) But they were to do all this partnership with Christ, through the leading of the Spirit

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<sup>14</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. 2, p. 85

**D. PART OF THE MISSION, THE SENDING WORK OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH IS TO CALL PEOPLE BACK FROM THEIR REJECTION OF GOD**

1. As Paul reminded the church in Corinth;

**II Corinthians 5:18-6:1**

<sup>18</sup> And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. <sup>19</sup> For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" <sup>21</sup> For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin,\* so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

**6** As God's partners,\* we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God's kindness and then ignore it.

2. Clearly we as God's people, the church, the body of Christ—are commissioned and sent to engage and share in God's continuing work of forgiveness, of love and reconciliation

a) We are called to accept God's gift, and share it with others

b) We are sent to speak and act for Christ, and plead with those around us, to "come back to God", to receive the remittance of their sinful rejection of him

3. This is what mission is about—this is what deep and wide church are about.

a) It is clearly more than just looking after our own spiritual well being

**E. AS JOHN MCLEAN WROTE:**

Good theology starts with God, not with ourselves. When we start with ourselves, we get a skewed view of the gospel, and of life. Such an approach can leave us with a distorted theology that actually feeds hyper-individualism, rather than answering it. You may have come across the line that runs like this: I know God loves me. I am his beloved. I have the Holy

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\* Or to become sin itself.

\* Or As we work together.

Spirit! So I don't really need you, or anybody else. I certainly don't need church. All those difficult people! It's all about me, and I'm okay in God.

This is partly true – you are beloved by God. But when we start with God, we see the obvious, unavoidable, ineluctable truth is that this means we share in the life and love of God – a love that is inclusive, that reaches out to others in grace and kindness. A love that indeed is self-emptying, service focused and other-centred. Nothing could run more against hyper-individualism than the other-centredness of God revealed in the Incarnation, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and brought to communal life in the creation of the church.

...Jesus came from the inner life of God to show us who God is, and to save us – not just from sin, but for fellowship. God's purpose is sharing his life and love with humanity – with creating communion. And the church is part of this plan – “a long range plan, in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth” (Ephesians 1:6-10 The Message).

... The Holy Spirit opens us up to be other-centred, as God is. That is, the Holy Spirit doesn't create a closed community of the church, but opens the church up to the whole world, in love and genuine care for all others. In the Spirit, the church's mission functions so that all may have access to the Father through Jesus (Ephesians 2:18).

Church is made up of congregations of ordinary people, with all their human faults and flaws, in and through whom Christ chooses to be present to the world. Church takes place in worship, baptism, Eucharist, but also in the ordinary stuff of everyday life – love, service, kindness, compassion. A smile to those who need it. Food for the needy. Help for the marginalised. Being a comfort, encouragement and edification to others.

Church gives expression to the nature of God. It is participating in his mission, his ministry, his work on earth. It is the place we learn to love one another, and all mankind, the way the Father, Son and Spirit love one another. It is the very antidote to hyper-individualism, loneliness and isolation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> McLean, *Deep Church*

## CONCLUSION:

### I. SO WE HAVE SEEN;

#### A. THAT THE CHURCH IS NOT TO BE SELF-CENTRED

1. We are not called to just focus on our own salvation and doctrinal and behavioural standards and righteousness

a) God, Father, Son and Spirit are loving, outgoing, and reconciling

b) We are called together as the Church, the body of Christ, to share in God's life and mission

2. As Ross Hastings tells us;

The sentness of the church is connected to the sentness of the Son by Father, a sending planned in eternity past within the covenanting counsels of God. Mission is expressed as flowing from within the very life of the Trinity.<sup>16</sup>

3. He points out that, the missional church is,

...the church that participates in the love and life of the triune God, as a continuance of the mission of the Son from the Father, by the Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

#### B. IN BESTOWING HIS PEACE, HIS SHALOM UPON THE DISCIPLES, AND SENDING THEM AS THE FATHER SENT HIM;

1. Jesus was giving them, and us as the church today, not just freedom from immediate fears, but the "peace freshly accomplished between God and humanity by the cross."<sup>18</sup>

2. This is what lies at the heart of the gospel, and at the heart of mission--the faith, hope, love and peace of God, the message and work of reconciliation at all sorts of levels.

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<sup>16</sup> Hastings, p.27-28

<sup>17</sup> Hastings, p.16

<sup>18</sup> Hastings, p.24



3. Experiencing all of this ourselves, but then living it and sharing it with one another, and with the world around us

**C. PRAYER**

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