

Why Mission?

Because we're not in Kansas anymore, Toto

Come with me to the Sea of Galilee. It's the year 30 AD or so. It's a beautiful day and, as we stroll around the lake, we see a young man, a carpenter by profession, begin a movement that changes the world. It is, of course, Jesus. We see him call four 'uneducated,' honest, hard-working fishermen to join Him (Matthew 4). He models to them a very simple way of living. He asks them to live as he does and share with others the love, wisdom and 'good news' that He shares with them. His last words to them are, 'go and make disciples, teaching them everything I have taught you.' (Matthew 28).

Jesus' model works wonderfully. The disciples become a 'self-replicating' movement. By 100 AD historians think there were about 20,000 Christians and that, 200 years later, they numbered in the millions. This was without professional leadership; without buildings as we have them now; they didn't even have the New Testament worked out yet. During those 300 years Christians also faced persecution from the Roman Empire and others which reached its peak in the persecutions of Diocletian in 303-310 AD. Then, a miracle! As a result of what he claimed was a vision of Christ just before the Battle of Milvian Bridge in October 312, Emperor Constantine, who won the battle, made Christianity his favoured, protected religion.

This allowed the church to, in safety, develop and organise, formalise the Scriptures and work out its many questions. Good news for the church!
...or was it?

It was certainly better than being fed to lions and burnt alive. It set in place a chain of events that led to 'Christendom;' an era in which belief in God was the worldview of virtually everyone, certainly in the West, and Christian values informed everything. The Church professionalised its leadership, constructed church buildings and became an institution at the very center of life, not just in terms of religion, but politically and socially as well.

But there were some unexpected, negative side effects. Ministry grew increasingly clergy-centered. Indeed, ordained ministry came to be called '*the* ministry.' The result? The majority of Christians tended to become passive, leaving 'ministry' to the clergy. Sunday church attendance became the key, and

sometimes only, element of discipleship. Everyone came to church. It was frowned upon not to. In the West at least, we forgot about Jesus' self-replicating model.

But times have changed. Whether we want to admit it or not, Christendom has ended! It's happened within the lifetime of anyone 40 years or older. Western Culture has resoundingly rejected Christianity. Every denomination of the Church is in serious decline in every Western country.

All this raises serious questions: are we living our Christian lives and conducting our church programs as if we were still living in 'Christendom?' Are we still thinking that if we just get our Sunday content right, people will come again as they used to?

Or... are we equipping ourselves to live out Jesus' model of being disciple-making disciples?