

Post-Christendom mission means seeing with fresh eyes

In the previous article we considered the reality that we live in, but so often overlook, in which Christendom has ended. The era in which Christianity was the norm in western culture started with Emperor Constantine and fizzled out sometime in the late 20th century.

The implications are huge and demand a change in our approach! Yet, through the 25 years of ordained ministry I have often observed that we are so daunted by the challenge of the times we live in, that we repeatedly revert to Christendom models of being church. These models keep the focus on Sunday attendance and 'in-strategies' (ie: What must we do to get people to come 'in?').

But we do not have to be daunted. We proclaim and minister in the name of the Living God. We have his promise that he will be with us as we 'go and make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them everything that He has commanded us.' (Matthew 28: 18-20). We just have to be open to new ways of thinking about how we do that. We have to be okay with trying new things and roll with the successes and even (perceived) failures, as we re-learn how to engage with the world around us.

So I want to start with a simple, fun exercise. This Sunday when you attend your church service, try and see the whole experience - from the moment you park your car to the moment you leave - through the eyes of someone who has never attended a service before. Pretend you know nothing of what usually happens. Is everything clear as to what to do and where to go? If you were a newcomer, would the service be easy to follow? Would it be clear where to go if you wanted to stay for coffee? Would anyone speak to you if you did stay?

See whether a few others from your church will do the exercise as well and discuss your observations. Or an even better way to do this exercise would be to enlist a family member or friend who doesn't normally go to church. Tell them you honestly want to see the whole experience through new eyes... no strings attached.

In the next article we start to consider how we grow individually and corporately as missional disciples. We'll start in small steps and we'll start with the principle of the 'Open Front Door'.

PS. If you would like a book recommendation to help you consider all this further, I suggest 'The Forgotten Ways' by Alan Hirsch, 2nd edition. Hirsch describes the impact on the church now that Christendom is over and how we equip ourselves to be a more missional movement. Hirsch was the guest speaker at the clergy conference in May 2017 and was utterly brilliant! :)