

Some of you know that my wife Elizabeth used to run her own Pilates Studio. After a few years, when Elizabeth visited her accountant at the end of the financial year, he said, 'Congratulations Elizabeth, for the first time you've made enough profit to pay tax, and he went on to explain that she had made about \$45,000 profit – which took her past the tax threshold. She replied, 'I'd rather it was double that,' at which the accountant leaned back and said, 'But that's not why you do it, is it?'

This was a very astute remark. Elizabeth founded the studio not to make money but to provide gentle, strengthening exercise for people over 50 – and in fact this was almost certainly a key element in its success. As Simon Sinek, a leading business consultant has observed, 'It's not what you do that matters, but why you do it.' What he was trying to say is that it's the reason that underpins what you do that gives what you do meaning and direction and energy.

In my work as the Ministry Development Advisor for the Diocese I came across a few churches which were busy doing this or that but sometimes they didn't seem to know why they were doing it, and this confusion hampered their efforts to share the good news of Jesus with their surrounding community. If you don't know the 'why' of your ministry, you'll hardly be able to communicate it to people outside the church. The key thing is not what you do, it's why you do it.'

If you were to ask St Paul about the purpose – or why - of his ministry he could, no doubt (being Paul), answer at some length. In our New Testament passage from 2 Corinthians 4, however, he gives us a one-line summary of both the purpose and nature of his ministry. As part of his defence against criticism from some people within the Corinthian church Paul writes:

We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. (2 Corinthians 4.5)

Most of us, I hope, would readily accept Paul's summary of the purpose of his ministry as applying also to local churches – surely we have a corresponding purpose to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord? I mean, we use these words constantly, don't we, in our worship

services? We begin our worship with the greeting 'The Lord be with you,' and later we bless each other with the words 'the peace of the Lord be always with you,' we pray through 'Jesus Christ our Lord', and so many of our hymns reinforce the proclamation that Jesus is Lord -

'All hail the power of Jesus' name (we sing)

And crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him Lord of all.

I wonder though, if perhaps we have become a bit too familiar with these words that we use so regularly, maybe they have become a kind of formula which we say without thinking.

There's a story of a minister who decided to try replacing the traditional greeting of 'The Lord be with you' with something less formal, so on the following Sunday he came out and said, 'Good Morning everybody' – to which the congregation replied 'And also with you!' The Sunday after he went back to the traditional greeting!

What does it mean, really, to affirm – in our liturgy, in our hymns and in our hearts - that 'Jesus Christ is Lord'?

St Paul uses various combinations of these words – he may speak of 'the Lord Jesus Christ' or 'Christ Jesus our Lord' or simply 'the Lord Jesus' or 'Jesus is Lord' and sometimes he greets or directs his readers 'in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ', but in every case Paul is using a kind of shorthand – and that's what we need to unpack.

Possibly the earliest test of Christian faith was a person's capacity and willingness to repeat the simple statement 'Jesus is Lord'. Paul himself refers to this in his first letter to the Corinthians when tells his readers, 'No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. What he means by that is that it is only as the Holy Spirit brings us to the realisation that Jesus did indeed die for our sins and that God raised him from death and thus publicly declared him to have cancelled the power of sin and conquered the power of death. The declaration 'Jesus is Lord' then encapsulates all this – it's a shorthand way of referring to the crucified Jesus who is also the risen Jesus – and it also affirms that those making that declaration had come to a personal decision to trust in Jesus for their salvation – for their

wellbeing in life and for their own victory over death – and thus to admit him as the Lord of their lives. One 6 y.o. girl asked by her Sunday School teacher what it means to believe in Jesus said, 'It means you put Jesus on the throne of your life.' You won't find a much better answer than that. To proclaim 'Jesus Christ is Lord' – as Paul does in our NT reading – includes all of this in one concentrated phrase, and it shouldn't be said lightly.

The thing is that to proclaim 'Jesus Christ as Lord' is not only speaking of something that is true for Christians – it's also making a universal declaration. It's as St Paul says to the Philippians:

Therefore (that is, after his death for us) God has highly exalted him so that, at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The Anglican Bishop and theologian Tom Wright is fond of telling a story of a London cabbie who, while they were stuck in traffic, decided to tell what was wrong with the Church. Anglicans were getting distracted, he said, by too many high falutin discussions and ought to concentrate on what's really important. 'The way I see it,' he said, 'is it's all down to the resurrection init? If the resurrection of Jesus is true, that changes everything, for everyone, everywhere, ain't that right Bishop?' Bp Wright, tells us, 'I could only agree - if the resurrection is true at all, then it is true for all.'

The proclamation of Jesus as Lord involves the proclamation of the resurrection as true for all – and from the earliest times the Christian church saw that as the core of its mission – or to put that another way – it was the 'why' of Christian mission – it was the reason behind how they lived and what they did. That, it seems to me, provides a clear example for every local church, ours included. The foundational and driving purpose for all of our activities – whatever shape or form they take – must be the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord. This proclamation encapsulates the good news we have to share. The key thing is not what we do, it's why we do it.

Finally, let me say that, whilst the 'why' of our mission is foundational, Paul here also gives us a bit of a clue as to 'how' we should approach that mission. He tells the Corinthians that he and his co-workers view themselves as their 'slaves for Christ's sake.' To put this another way, Paul and company were prepared to accept the role of a servant – to put their responsibilities to the Corinthian Church ahead of their own needs or comfort in order to serve church members by clarifying for them the good news of Jesus, and its meaning for their lives. They were prepared to serve the Corinthian church for the sake of Jesus. There's an obvious lesson here for the way in which church leaders view their roles, but there is also an implication for the way in which a local church views its responsibility to proclaim Jesus as Lord to its local community. Yes, the death for us and the resurrection of Jesus is a universal truth which, as a local church, and as individual Christians, we have a duty to proclaim – but we are called to do that in a way that serves our local community, and that may well mean putting some community needs ahead of our own needs or comfort. Why should we do that? Easy question! For the sake of Jesus!