

Everyday Church

Reflection

Take time together to read Ephesians 1v3-14.

As you read reflect on who Christ is and the salvation we have received through him. Respond by praising and giving thanks to God.

Life at the Margins

1 Peter 1v1-12

'Christian' Ireland.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is gradually being pushed to the furthest margins of our culture and society.

Many people in Ireland claim to be Christian, but that does not mean they have faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour, an allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord or a commitment to those who belong to Jesus Christ – the church.

In fact it's very possible today to call yourself a Christian but not believe in a personal God! Very often being Christian is simply a way of defining what you are not i.e. a Muslim or a Buddhist.

According to the 2009 Census the population in Ireland was 4.2 Million.

3.7 million (80%) claimed to be Christian (Catholic, C of I, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal). However attendance at church tells a different story.

The Iona Institute also conducted a report in 2009 on Church attendance.

Weekly attendance – 46%

Monthly attendance – 19%

Annual attendance – 10%

These figures are reduced when related to the younger generation, age 18-24.

Weekly attendance – 31%

Monthly attendance 22%

Coupled with that, in recent times there has been an increased rejection and greater hostility towards Church and Christianity.

Once upon a time the church and her message were central to life and community.

The state authorized the church while the church supported the state.

Christianity became a civil religion. To be born in Ireland was to be born into the church.

The church and her leaders were given special privileges and afforded special rights, while the people lived under it's care and direction.

However all that is changing.

Today the Church is not to be trusted and the message of Christianity is considered outdated.

In recent days our government has publicly criticised the church and her leaders, while the media ridicules it's stance on moral issues.

'The ultimate result of this tendency will be a society that is hostile to Christian truth and practise' (CARE).

Ireland Today.

According to the 'World Christian Database', the ten nations least responsive to the gospel are all found in Europe. Included in that top ten is Ireland.

Although Ireland has a high percentage of people who call themselves Christians, the data shows that Ireland has pushed the gospel of Jesus Christ to the farthest margins of our society and life.

What does all this mean?

The point is much of our evangelistic efforts are aimed at inviting people to church services or to church events when almost 50% of people do not go to church or do not have an interest in going!

The assumption that people will come to us must change to one of we must go to them.

A large barrier exists between church and the people, and so we must climb over the wall and go to where they are.

Recent efforts to invite people to events or respond to church advertisement have produced few results. (There are approx 3,000 homes in Carrigaline)

Magazine/Calendar Distribution

Year 1 – 3 requests for a bible

Year 2 – 1 request for a bible

Year 3 – 0 request

Year 4 – 0 request

Prodigal Son Flyer

1 email response

1 visit to the church

While none of this is wasted and while we recognise that requests and responses are not the way to measure salvation it does indicate to us how people respond to invites and advertisements.

We need to do mission outside church events and church invites. It's no good blaming the lost for failing to turn up to Church or moaning that people no longer take Christianity seriously.

'We need to do church and mission in the context of everyday life. We must think of church as a community of people who share life, ordinary life. And the bedrock of mission will be ordinary life'. (Timmis & Chester)

We need to be out there, on their turf in their culture, living authentic lives and speaking the unique message of Christ to a people that don't trust the church and can't relate to it's message.

This is the encouragement Peter gave to the Christians who had been 'scattered' into the world.

Strangers and Aliens.

Reading 1 Peter we soon discover that we are not alone.

The Christians Peter writes to are 'strangers in the world' v1, 'foreigners' v17, 'aliens' 2v11.

These terms reflect the fact that this world is not our home and we are waiting for our inheritance – the new creation 1v4.

But it also reflects the social alienation we feel and experience as we live as God's people in a hostile world.

At the time of writing Rome frequently expelled those who were not Roman citizens and were deemed to be trouble makers to other parts of the empire. Many of those who were sent away were the Christians.

When people became Christians their allegiance transferred from the Emperor to Christ and their citizenship changed from Rome to heaven.

As a result they were socially ostracised. So too our faith makes us strangers in our own land – we don't fit in, we are on the margins, pushed out.

Because we are strangers *'you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials'* 1v6.

In other words we face certain kinds of opposition.

'They accuse you of doing wrong' 2v12

'Those who speak maliciously against you' 3v16

'Those who insult you' 4v14

Generally speaking there is an open hostility towards Christians and their message and it is this hostility that pushes us out to the margins and we feel isolated, strangers and aliens.

Question:

In what way do you feel like a stranger?

Christ our Salvation.

While Christians in every age feel like strangers we must remember that Christ was a stranger here on earth for us.

Peter reminds them that Christ suffered for us.

'Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest of care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.' 1v10

The Old Testament looked forward to the promise of salvation in Christ but it also also predicted the sufferings of Christ. The salvation that Christ would achieve for us only came through his sufferings on the cross.

Christ was pushed out to the margins. He was isolated and rejected for us. He became a stranger for us so that we could be welcomed in.

Remember Jesus was taken outside the city to the cross, he was cut off from the land of the living, he was treated as a stranger by his father – so that we could be made clean, forgiven of our sin so we would no longer be strangers and aliens to God but *'a people belonging to God'* 2v9 and the *'people of God'* 2v10.

Question:

How does our salvation help us deal with being a stranger?

Life at the margins.

But Peter does not stop there. Later he reminds them that *'because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps' 2v21.*

Following Christ's example will mean suffering, hostility, rejection and isolation for us. The reality is *'we have become outsiders just as Jesus was an outsider. We are marginal in our culture because Jesus is marginal. The cross is the ultimate expression of marginalisation, and to follow Jesus, to follow his example is to experience marginalisation and hostility'* (Timmis Chester).

This is the normal experience of Christian life.

But all is not lost, the cross reminds us that life on the margins is where God works his salvation. It is here on the edge that people see the church as being different, a community that is Holy 1v15, without hypocrisy and envy 2v2, who are model citizens 2v13, loving and compassionate 3v8, forgiving and hospitable 4v8-9 and demonstrate servant leadership 5v2.

As we live our lives 'among the pagans' 2v12 people will see lives that have been changed and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. We will be the first to welcome and love those who are also marginalised in our society.

It maybe hard living at the margins but it is here that we are best placed to do something.

Question:

What will it look like to live life on the margins?

Response

Thank God that Christ has welcomed us in to be the people of God.

Thank God for our future inheritance, that can never perish spoil or fade.

Ask God that we will better understand our calling to live life at the margins.

Ask God to work though us and in us, so that, we will be a community that is everything God calls us to be.