

Sermon: 21st August 2022, A Parable about being a missional church.

Readings: 1 Peter 2:4-9 and Luke 13:10-17

To help us think about mission this morning I am going to tell you a true story, but I want you to hear the story as if it is a parable. As you know Jesus taught in parables often and on the surface his stories seem like simple tales, however underneath the surface they have a deeper meaning or even layers of meaning.

This story is recorded in the ABCNews app dated 1 May 2021. ¹

An old church site in Montrose's leafy north-east became a developer's dream when it came on the market. But about 35 residents in Sunnyville had a different vision. When the property was put up for sale, a loosely connected group banded together to try to purchase the site. Contributions ranged from \$20 to \$120,000, but in the space of a few days they were able to amass enough for a \$220,000 deposit. An offer of nearly \$2.2 million was accepted.

Resident Marissa Jonquil nearly runs out of breath when she describes how the group plans to transform the former Uniting Church and kindergarten into a community centre. "There's been loads of suggestions, obviously," she says. "Shared food, shared meals, shared cups of tea, teaching each other how to do things, old and new technology, sharing between generations, lots of gardening, lots of growing food and cooking food together ..." Ms Jonquil takes a breath and carries on.

"Food swaps, plant swaps, people talk about dance in this space. Someone was like, 'can we put a basketball hoop outside?'"

For fellow resident Kate Barth, the potential of the site represents what she loves about the area she has lived in her entire life. "A lot of us have dreamed of something like this for some time," she said. "We're determined, and we have a lot of passion and a lot of goodwill behind us."

Ms Jonquil said the residents were in the final stages of formalising a co-operative and were hopeful of securing a social enterprise loan. But she estimated they would still need to raise "at least \$900,000" on their own. A busy period of fundraising, letterbox dropping, and lobbying is in store. Ms Jonquil, a lawyer, said some of the group had offered to put their own houses on the line, such was their passion for their project. The settlement date is in the middle of June.

How does this story strike you? I am particularly drawn to the way the article describes the people who are rallying together to buy the site. They are passionate, and full of goodwill. They have dreams, and visions about the way the site could be used for the common good of community, and some are even willing to make a considerable sacrifice by putting their homes up for collateral.

¹ <https://apple.news/AMyvcB1qBQ1WZpU9UjMAmNq>

Determination, passion, goodwill, dreams, and visions, the common good and sacrifice, these words are Kingdom of Heaven words, they are church words, they are missional words.

The news article does not say why the Sunnyville UC was forced to close its doors, but I did some googling during the week and discovered that the Sunnyville congregation merged with a nearby church to focus on mission in that area. It's a great shame they didn't leave the building to the community as their parting legacy because even in the darkest moment of crisis there is room for a little ray of light. I also wonder if they missed the missional opportunities right outside their doors.

Just like the crippled women who could only see the ground in front of her feet, we too can fail to see clearly the opportunities that surround us. When our vision is too narrow it is Jesus healing presence and power that can open up a whole new world and give us a new perspective. The church has managed to uphold rituals and traditions very nicely and many churches cling to Sunday morning worship until the last persons drops. Somewhere along the way we forgot that the church as the Body of Christ is called to be so much more than a kind of club for nice people who like to sing hymns, pray a bit, and have a lovely morning tea. None of those things are bad, in fact they are very good and wholesome things, and I am being a bit cheeky in the way I have just described a typical Sunday morning, *but Jesus was pretty punchy in his teaching, so I am just following in his footsteps*

To finish listen again to the way in which 1 Peter describes our mission.

We are “ a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of the one who called us and brought us out of darkness into the marvelous, light of God.”

C. J. Wright describes our mission, saying

“It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, but that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission - God’s mission”.²

There is no manual or step by step guide on ‘How to grow the church in 2022 Greystanes edition’, we may wish there was, however, we do know from God’s word in Scripture, that we are to proclaim God’s great plan to reconcile all things to Godself, to make peace with all creation and draw all people into a community founded on the love of God. That is a message the world needs to hear desperately.

Here is the good news, I believe that God gives us full marks just for ‘trying’, for being willing to take some risks, because in the end it will not be our successes and failures that define us, but our willingness, to take a brave step into the future as God’s partners in mission.

Amen.

² C.J Wright, *The Mission of God*, Intervarsity Press, 2006.