

Good morning, today is Global Poverty Sunday and this morning I want us to think about our response to poverty wherever we find it and in whatever form it takes.

When Jesus taught, He spoke about being good news for the poor, freedom for the prisoners, sight to the blind and for the release for the oppressed.

When he taught, he spoke about being hope and being hope for everybody.

Today, you and I, this church, we are agents of that hope.

We are custodians of a message of hope that transforms people's lives and we are called to give it away wherever and whenever we can.

When we see someone who is Poor (whether it is poverty of food, poverty of education, poverty of options - poverty of truth) (when we see someone who is poor) we who have food, education, options, understanding are called to share it with them.

This is: our mission; it is a sign that we belong to Jesus; it is the power to change lives.

The Apostle John said *"if anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with **actions AND truth**".*

You and I, our church are called to bring hope: in word AND deed, in truth AND action.

So if you would turn with me to 1 John 3, p1227,

we see that we are to bring hope for 3 reasons:

because it is our mission,

because it is a sign that we belong to Jesus; and

because it is the power to change lives

It's our mission, it's a sign, it's the power

Firstly, we are to bring hope in Truth and Deed because it is:

1. The Mission of the Church.

John says in v17 *"If you see a brother in need and you don't help them. then how does the love of Christ dwell in you?"*.

John is reminding the church of something that God has always called his people to do.

1,500 years earlier God said in Deuteronomy 15v7.

If there is a poor person among you, do not be hardhearted or tight-fisted. But rather be open-handed and freely lend to them whatever they need.

In Deuteronomy Chapter 4 God explains WHY. He says

I have taught you these laws because this will show your wisdom to the Nations and the Nations will say: "what other Nation is so great to have a God like this?"

One of the reasons why we care for the vulnerable, the poor, the marginalised is because it points people to the God who cares.

Jesus said "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven"

Do you see?

Our mission is to show the Nations (the non-believing peoples, our neighbours) **who God is** by being a community that believes in justice, in fairness, in saying “you have little, we have much, so we will share with you”.

Therefore, the reason why Southover does:

Monday Club for older people,
Causeway Prospects for those with special needs,
Southover Counselling for those that need help. and
are close to launching a Care Agency to help the vulnerable stay in their homes longer...
in fact, the reason why we do ALL our ministries
is not just because it pleases God;
is not just because it helps others –
but because it points people to the God that cares.

The reason why

we are involved with the poor in Rwanda, or
the unemployed in Egypt, or
the marginalised with HIV, and
all our other mission partners is
not just because it pleases God and helps them –
but because it shows people that God that cares.

Jesus said “Let your light shine”, put it on a stand, let people see!

This is our mission to show people in actions that speak louder than words that God cares.

In Exodus 19 when God got the whole of Israel together, he said to them
“I want you to be a Kingdom of Priests”.

He said “I want you to be a whole kingdom of Priests”
so that you can represent Me to the other nations,
so that you can stand in the gap between Me and those that don't believe
so that you can be a bridge pointing people to the God who cares.
God said this 3,500 years ago,

1,500 years later Peter said to the church

*“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation... I urge you, to live such good lives among the pagans that, they may **see your good deeds and glorify God”.***

Every man and woman in our church, you and me, we
have a mission to point people to God by our **words** and our **deeds**.

The last Roman Emperor Julian, was so irritated at how Christianity was spreading through the empire, that he wrote:

“do you not see that it is the benevolence of Christians to strangers that has done most to advance their cause? It is disgraceful that the Christians not only support their poor but our poor as well, while everyone is able to see that our people lack aid from us.”

God has said “people will look at you and see how you relate to the poor (the marginalised, the vulnerable, the searching) and if they see you giving yourself away, spending yourself on them, giving your time and money and concern and effort they’ll say “who is this God that calls these people to love others in this way?”.

We are Priests who stand in the gap offering sacrifice for the poor.

Our mission, our calling, is to love in words and deeds, in truth and action so that people may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

So firstly, its our mission, but it is also

2. The sign that we belong to Jesus.

In 1 John 3, John poses the same question again and again and again...

He asks

How can we know that we know him? v14

How can we know that we are really his? v19

How can we know that he lives in us? v24

In other words –

how do we really know that we are a Christians?

Well, he gives us three tests – He says

2.1) There is the truth test

John says in 4v2 *“this is how you can recognise the Spirit of God in you – every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God”*

He is saying

to recognise that Jesus is God Incarnate,

to trust that God in Jesus has died for us

to have the boldness to acknowledge before our friends and a sceptical world that Jesus is “God with us”.

This is the first test that we are His.

To the people who say “I like to think of myself as a Christian and I believe that Jesus was a good man, a great leader, a fine moral teacher - but not the Son of God –who died in my place, to take my punishment – but I would still call myself a Christian”

John replies “well, you may think you are a Christian but you don’t *know* him”.

Look imagine someone came up to me and said

“you know Steve, I like to think of you as a terrible parent” ☺

“I like to think of you as someone who lets his kids run wild, who never disciplines his children, who is altogether too easy going”.

And I said “well, with all due respect, if you ask my kids, and if you ask me, I’m worried that I’m too strict with them!”

And the replies “well that doesn’t matter, because I like to think of you as a parent who just lets his kids run wild - and I have the right to think what I want”

My response would be “Sure you have the right – I mean nobody is going to arrest you – but our relationship is over - because if you’re not willing to listen to me, or look at the evidence - if you are simply going to relate to me based upon your own imagination - then we don’t really have a relationship because you don’t know me!”

It’s the same with Jesus –

To know him is to engage with what he said about himself and the evidence that supports it.

That's how we know, and how we know we know!

There is the truth test

But there is also

2.2 The Belonging Test.

John says in v14 *"we know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brothers"* – He calls the church: brothers, he calls US family,

Then he says v16, *"Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and so we ought to lay down our lives for our brethren"*.

We know we belong when we are willing to give ourselves for each other.

You know, as any church grows the importance of understanding this truth becomes ever more critical. As a church grows, it is natural for people to struggle with a sense of belonging. Its less personal.

So notice this, that God does NOT say

"we know we belong because of what others do for US, because others make us feel we belong".

It says "we know we belong because of what Christ has done for us – and what WE are willing to do for others"

The truth is really clear here

we get our sense of belonging – not from what other people do for us –

but from what Christ has already done AND what we are willing to do for others.

This is really important.

To be church, is NOT to ask "what will you do for me BUT what can I do for you".

To be church, is NOT to complain "I am getting nothing out of this" – but to seek to give.

To be church is to say "I see the vision, I get the mission, I understand our common calling – now let me serve".

The mission of this church is to make whole-hearted disciples of Jesus Christ by serving in truth and action that others may see and say "wow, God is great among you"!

And how do we serve?

We can pray. We can ALL pray.

We can make others feel welcome by thinking of ourselves as hosts ...

We can join a small group to share our lives – for that is what families do.

We can see that Christ gave himself for us – and so try to do the same for others.

And if we won't do that, then we WILL struggle to know that we belong,

We know we belong when we give of ourselves to the mission of the church

The truth test, the belonging test, and finally

2.3 The Obedience Test.

John says in 4v24 *"we know that we know him if we obey his commands"*.

How do we know if we really know someone?

If we really love them?

Well we would stop doing things that constantly made them weep, that offended them or dishonours them.

If we say “well I’m a Christian and I know that there are some things that I am doing that offend Christ, I know that what I am doing at the moment is wrong, but hey, I am going to do it anyway” -

If there is no grief, no regret, no repentance -

then we may claim that we are a Christian BUT we can’t know that we know him.

For if we really knew Jesus, then how could we continue to do things that make him weep, that go against everything that he stands for and died for?

How could we?

If we say “well I know that Jesus doesn’t want me to do this but I am going to do it anyway – then we can’t know that we know him”

We know we know him when we when we stop doing things that offend him – and when we start to do things that delight him

If we know that Jesus freely gave himself for us then we will more and more give ourselves for others.

So what can we do to bring hope to the poor?

Here are 4 practical suggestions:

we can pray as if it all depends on God and live as if it all depends on us.

We can say “you have little freedom we have much” so I will exercise that freedom by buying only Fairtrade goods where I can.

Fairtrade goods guarantees a fair wage, decent working conditions, respect for the workers – companies will use the Fairtrade logo if they can, if they can’t then we would do well to avoid their product.

We can pray, we can use our buying power,

We can say “you have no voice” so I will use mine to Sign petitions, write letters, join websites and sign up to newsletters – so that your plight is heard.

We can say “you have no money” and I have some so I will share it with you, if will fundraise for you, I will be involved for you.

Then the Nations will look around and say – “look how generous they are, look how open they are, look how passionate they are, “wow – what do they know that I don’t know – WHO do they know that I don’t know”.

How do we know we know Him?

There is the truth test, the belonging test and the obedience test

3. So Where do we get the power to do this?

for this sounds extraordinarily difficult!

3.1 Well we don’t get it from a sense of guilt!

Guilt is a terrible motivation to give ourselves for others.

Guilt will exhaust us and make us resentful.

In v20, John says “*This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence when our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts*”.

if we rely on guilt then our hearts will never be at rest, for they will always condemn us “that we have not done enough”

If we get involved in the needs of other people “through guilt”,
If we try to love others “to feel better about ourselves”,
If we try to help others “to feel useful, affirmed, successful”
then sooner or later we will be condemned by our own heart for not having done enough.

Do you remember the film Schindler’s list?

Oscar Schindler was a German businessman who during WW2 bribed Nazi officials to save Jewish lives by placing them in his factories.

He was not a saint but he did an incredible thing.

He gave away his money, he spent his influence to save 1000’s of Jewish lives. It was a great thing he did.

At the end of the film though – he doesn’t see it that way.

At the end of the film he is surrounded by all the people whose lives he had saved –

But he feels wretched, his heart condemns him and he falls to his knees.

He looks at his watch and he says “why did I keep this! - I could have sold this and saved another life!

He looks at his car – and says “that would have saved 5 lives!”.

The last track of the film is entitled “I could have done more”, “I could have done more”

When we start to get involve in the needs of others because of guilt or because we want to feel good about ourselves our heart will eventually condemn us because
unless we give our all (unless we do what Jesus Christ did who gave his all)
unless we are perfect – the epitaph will be “you could have done more”.

Unless you tire yourself to death,

unless you put in 15 hour days every day

Unless you chose not to go on holiday,

Unless you decide not to buy new clothes

your heart will rightly condemn you for you could have done more.

Guilt will strangle us, it will drive us to exhaustion, it will break us
we do not get the power to love others through guilt

3.2 We get it through love.

John says in Chapter 3v1 “*how great is the love that the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God*”

Or in the King James Version “*behold what manner of love is given unto us that we should be called children of God*”.

Behold, Look, See, **this** love!

That God gives to us that we should be adopted as his children!

He is not just our King! he is our Father!

We are not just his creation, we are his children!

Behold the love that went to the cross for you and me!

Do you see what is happening?

You are watching someone in dynamic relationship with God right before your eyes!

Can you sense his encounter with truth?

“behold what manner of love is given unto us that we should be called children of God”.

You are looking at the difference between someone who merely knows about Christ and someone who knows him

You are looking at the difference between someone who merely says “Jesus died for me” and who knows Jesus died for him.

We are watching the penny drop all over again!

This is the power to love others.

This is what will cause us to want to belong here

This is what will change the way we act towards other people, because real, its personal, it is the only workable reason why we would do any of this.

Our mission is to spend ourselves on others

- not because of what we can get out of it

- not because we want to assuage our guilt

but because we individually and as a whole can say together

“wow, behold, what manner of love is this”.

This gratitude becomes the motivation for serving others

- we don't complain that we don't belong

- we don't moan that others are not doing enough for us

we simply say

Because he has loved me I will love you

Because he has given himself to me I will give myself to you

Because he has made the sacrifice I will count it my duty and joy to do the same.

We want to be a church that loves others as Christ loves us

We want to be a church that loves in Words and Actions

We want the world to see and say “you know someone I don't”

So I invite to join us,

to pray

to add your voice,

to give your energy

to support with finance

to get involved

to bring good news for the poor,

freedom for the prisoners,

sight to the blind and

for the release for the oppressed

that people may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.