



not? Is it about confidence in speaking from the front, fear of being judged by others in terms of what you say or don't say, uncertainty about your relationship with Christ, uncertainty about your relationship with others in the congregation, not knowing what to pray about? I would find it interesting to hear from you on this point.

Churches that focus on God's goodness and reality, and on the world around them are deeply attractive. They do not have to talk about church growth or 'giving'. They are, indeed, living the two great commandments.

***You are God's gift to the people who live here, in this place. Isn't this a privilege and a responsibility?***

### **Study: Luke**

#### **10:2-37**

What does it cost to be a Good Samaritan? Who are our neighbours?  
Who is calling out for help in the world around us?

#### **Isaiah 42: 1-9**

What is church for?

What needs working on to maintain/facilitate/grow the outward-focus of this church?

#### **Meditation**

The Church is called to express the life of Jesus Christ, whose whole ministry was shaped by the conviction that

*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. (John 3:16)*

life, live by a different set of values and have something to share with others about making sense of life. Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan and the application of faith to life, without which the faith is dead, or at the very least, compassionless.

### **Respond to human need by loving service**

Healthy churches operate on the 'abundance mentality' of the Gospel. Such churches are full of stories of how God has been experienced 'out there' in daily life and in the local community. In these situations, people often cannot refrain from telling the good news: *'We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard,'* (Acts 4: 20).

This healthy focus is often evident in the intercessions in Sunday services. They have an inclusive, life-affirming breadth that speaks of a good and generous God being worshipped in this place.

Intercessions on Sunday are not about proving eloquence, or doggedly maintaining the formula set out in *Common Worship*. Intercessions are the outpouring of our concerns for the world, the church, the local community. When they are offered by the community the concerns of the heart are revealed. It tells me what and who is important to you. It tells me about the level of confidence a community has in God. The specific nature of such prayers, were they offered, tells me how engaged this church is with what is going on. Intercessions act as a barometer measuring our focus.

We do not have an intercessions rota. Would you like one? Would anyone want to do the intercessions if a rota was offered? If not, why

happening outside of it. The one needs the other, and anyone involved in this work is called to love both.

The question is, when you look at the thousands of new houses and think of the sheer number of people living in them, are you really concerned about their spiritual and physical welfare? Do you have deep regret that we don't see many more of the people who live around us coming to church? Do you ever see someone and think, 'It would really help them to know Jesus?'

You are in the privileged position of being the custodians of a truth that can improve the lives of hundreds of people out there. Many will not want what we offer, but there will be some who really need to know the light of Christ in the darkness, and you hold it.

This leads on to the next heading; a healthy church makes connections between faith and living.

### **Make connections between faith and daily living**

What happens on Sunday is necessary and refuelling, but needs to be lived out in the week, hence: ***Send us out in the power of the Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.***

We say it every week. For many people, vicar included, the main focus of ministry lies in the opportunities presented by everyday opportunities. Healthy churches recognise this and work to equip church members to 'live the faith in the whole of life.' This is the key to healthy evangelism, when people find in their faith the resources for living that help them make sense of

the barriers that separated people from each other. Jesus did not set about projects for the sake of the project, or because he was altruistic. Jesus was concerned for and enacted social rehabilitation and liberation because he wanted people to know what God was like. And he told them that was why he acted as he did.

We too are called to be passionate and prophetic and to proclaim to the love of God to others. Examples of this may include drop-in centres for people struggling with debt, help for the unemployed, language classes for immigrants, homework clubs, work with local schools, cafés, etc...

But, in anything that we are involved with as a church, our motives for being involved should be absolutely clear. This requires total confidence in the Gospel. We are doing these things because we believe that God is love and we want you to know that. And when we are clear there are strong links back into the church that sends out its people (not person) to do the work of being in community. When the message we relay is not clear the sending Christian community becomes little more than an invisible donor disengaged from the work and questioning its purpose.

This work expresses God's generous care for all, especially the disadvantaged, but it involves a corporate commitment. Tasking one or two people to carry the burden of this mission is not sensible because it leads to frustration and burn out. It also sets up a rift between the inherited Christian community and what is

However, just as the Samaritan did what he could for the victim of the vicious attack, he could not ultimately stay and do all the caring. In a similar way, churches cannot do everything. They should not be expected to be the agent that solves all the problems, but they should *offer what they can*, clear in the knowledge of what they stand for, and be willing to partner alongside others. (And those partners appear - the people of peace - if you are serious about rooting yourself in the local communities).

### **Passionate and prophetic**

Such churches participate in mission by participating in God's love, for God is love and sends us out to share that love with others. They care about the world around them. They are clear about their motivation.

What was Jesus passionate and prophetic about? According to his Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4, quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus proclaimed passionately the contents of his future ministry. He was concerned with the great ministry of liberation - opening the eyes of the spiritually and physically blind, freeing captives from bondage, releasing those who are imprisoned in darkness.

Jesus was concerned with social justice but the underlying message was: there is hope, God loves you. Everything that Jesus did pointed to the one who had sent him. He was God's love in action; physically restoring damaged people so they could once more participate in civil and religious life; lifting the burdens of shame and guilt, greed and hostility, removing

Jesus was not removed from his context. He saw those who were infirm, maimed, suffering from horrendous diseases and had compassion on them. The Gospels tell us this time and again. But Jesus also saw social injustice and alienation from both religious and secular life. He spoke in defence of the widows and orphans as the prophets had done before him.

***How rooted are we in our local context? Are we aware of the aspirations and challenges, and open to solutions that come from a variety of different sources?***

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a parable about learning to love in the way God intended us to love. It is a parable about what love of neighbour looks like in practice – in context. Jesus tells the parable to an ‘expert in the law’ who is struggling to apply his academic faith to his life. When the expert tries to turn Jesus answer to his question into a theological debate, (attempting to justify himself), Jesus tells this story which demonstrates a concrete application of faith to life.

The religious walk by; in this case a priest and a Levite. Both are sticking rigidly to the law that discourages contact with a dead body. Contact equalled contamination. They do not investigate whether the person is dead or not but, on the roadside it certainly looks like he might be, so they walk past. Religion has triumphed over compassion. Not so with the despised Samaritan.

Being deeply rooted in our communities, or the desire to be deeply rooted in our communities, involves a love of neighbour and a deep compassion motivated by or love of God.

## **Second Mark: Outward looking Focus**

### **With a 'whole life' rather than a 'church life' concern**

Healthy Churches:

- are deeply rooted in the local community, working in partnership with other denominations, faiths, secular groups and networks
- passionate and prophetic about justice and peace, locally and globally
- make connections between faith and daily living - respond to need by loving service

The starting point for these churches is the world around and the whole of life. They demonstrate the truth that no group is happy or healthy unless it has a task to fulfil beyond itself, and the task is corporate. *(Change in emphasis away from churchianity and the 'correct' way of doing things, towards investing time in people – do they know Christ and have they understood the hope of the Gospel? Commitment to local – as opposed to gathered - church makes us missionary by default; we are deeply rooted in our communities by choosing local church).*

### **Deeply rooted in the local community**

*(What does Trumpington look like now?)*

Jesus was rooted in the life of his local communities. He spent time in the synagogue, in the Temple, with his family, he visited the market place, the fields of the countryside, the streets of villages and towns. He knew where the fishermen operated, who was collecting taxes and doubtless saw the fate of those who dared to strike a pose against Rome (dotted miserably around the Palestinian countryside).