



Thinking beyond the Buzzwords

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Amos 6:1a, 4-7, Matthew 5:13-16

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Church life is full of jargon, and for someone like myself who has been coming to church since I was 8 days old, it is easy to be blissfully unaware just how much we use it. The problem with jargon words, is that we can unwittingly exclude people, which is the last thing we want to do as a church.

Almost every part of human life has special words that relate only that area, or words that are used in that context with particular nuance and meaning that is different to how those words are used in everyday life. I can remember when I was studying musical composition at university that every would be composer was not so much judged on the quality of their music, so much as their ability to describe their music using words such as juxtaposition, permeation and climax.

Jargon can function as a secret language which marks the boundary of a community. Those who understand the jargon belong to that community. However by failing to understand how the language of a community is being used, one soon realises that they do not belong.

Jargon is not a bad thing in of itself. But these are dynamics we need to be aware of. If someone comes into our community we need to think about the language we use, and what our use of language may imply. Does our language suggest to newcomers they don't belong, or does it invite them in? Maybe it's a mixture of both, with some things hitting the mark, while other words drift over people's heads?

Today there is a particular jargon word I want to talk a little about, because I think that even within the church it is widely misunderstood. The word I am referring to is mission. The word mission is thrown about within the church, often with little clarity as to what is actually being spoken of. For some the word mission corresponds to overseas mission. That's an easy connection to make as there is a church body called the Anglican Board of Missions, which is primarily concerned with supporting missionary work throughout the world.

At diocesan synods I'm often acutely aware of the way mission is spoken of. I note how mission seems to have replaced the word ministry to refer to the work of the church. I can live with that, but a problem seems to arise when some people understand mission as broadly referring to the activity of the church, while others clearly understand mission as referring to evangelism, that is the work of spreading Christianity through sharing the Gospel

Yes, there is a connection between mission and evangelism, but mission means much much more than that. Some years ago the Anglican Consultative Council, clarified just what the mission of the church is. This is where we get what we call the Five-Fold Mission Statement, which is a much more expansive understanding of what this word mission is really referring to.

The two understandings of mission I just mentioned, that of overseas development and evangelism are covered by the first two points of this Mission Statement. They are 1 -To proclaim the Good News, and point 2 - To teach, baptise and nurture new believers. So those understandings are part of the work of the church, but there are three more points to the statement that give us a fuller understanding of what mission is.

Point 3 - To respond to human need by loving service. That makes a whole lot of sense. It's the love your neighbour clause, which is a fundamental aspect of Christian action.

Point 4 is the one that I warm to more than the others. It states: To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation. No I'm not saying that I'm particularly good at any of those things, but they are certainly aspirational.

But today it is actually the fifth point which I want to address, because it is at times the aspect of mission that the church forgets about. Point 5 is: To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

What this final point affirms is that as Christians, part of our faithful work in the world is to care for the earth itself. Christ called us to love our neighbour, and let's be honest we tend to think of that command as referring to other people. But our neighbours are also animals, plants, the air we breathe and the water we drink. Our lives are deeply connected with the environment, it is right to love it as much as we love each other.

As we know there are plenty of environmental issues that we should be concerned about. Today I'm going to focus on one, but more importantly,

rather than simply telling you about the problem I'm going to tell you what each of you can do about it.

A couple of years ago, a family member had a somewhat comical rant about how he had no interest in saving Pandas. His argument essentially was that while pandas might be cute and cuddly, they don't contribute to the world beyond being cute. He was far more interested in supporting animal welfare groups that were concerned about less poster friendly animals, such as bees.

Now I don't think those concerned with environmental issues should abandon attempts to save endangered species. I'm glad there are people out there trying to save pandas, whales and our native bird population. Those are all good things. But we certainly need to make saving bees a top priority.

There is a quote often mis-attributed to Albert Einstein which claims that were the honeybee to go extinct, humanity would perish within four years. This claim is not entirely accurate, but it certainly draws our attention to the simple truth that humans and bees have evolved in ways that have deeply entwined our respective destinies. Without honeybee and bumblebee pollination, which is supported by fly pollination, we would lose most of the food that sustains human life. If bees were to disappear, we would face a global starvation.

That's why we should be concerned that for a variety of reasons, not all of which are fully understood, bee populations across the world have been in decline. For example, wild bee populations in Europe have almost vanished. As bee populations have declined our dependency upon human beekeepers has increased.

The good news is that humans have been living with bees and working with them for thousands of years. There is evidence that Egyptians were keeping bees long before the time of Moses. Over the centuries we have learnt a great deal about the complexity of bee life and how we can support them.

So here is a beehive. Right now it is empty, but sometime in the next few weeks a new colony will go into this hive and they will begin to grow and to produce many things. Inside that hive bees will create wax, propolis, more bees, royal jelly, they will store nectar and pollen, and all things going well come January there will be enough honey for them, and

some surplus for me as well. I am an advocate for ethical bee keeping, meaning that I do not rob them of all their honey. Ethical bee keeping is about partnership, not exploitation.

Now when I began talking about the mission of the church, I doubt any of you thought that keeping bees would be part of that mission. But when put in perspective, by seeing how important bees are to the welfare of all human life, as well as many other forms of plant and animal life, we can see that such an activity can be an act of faith.

Now I did say that this part of the mission of the church was something that all of you can do, but I am yet to tell you exactly how. I am not suggesting that you all get hives and start looking after bees. Do we have any other beekeepers here this morning? *That is great.* But most of us, don't really fancy the prospect of stings, even if we like the idea of honey.

That said, later this morning I will be releasing a box of bumblebees from the top of our belltower. They will slowly leave the hive, bumblebees take things pretty gently, before heading off around this neighbourhood to begin pollenating. In about 8 week's time they will produce a number of queens who will then go and establish wild hives in the wider community, and continue to pollenate plants in this area. So that's something we are doing as a community today. As a community we are helping to reestablish bumblebees in this city.

There is another thing you can do to support bees which is even simpler: here is no point in anyone having a beehive unless there is enough pollen, nectar and water in the local area to support the bees. Those three things are the lifeblood of a healthy hive.

The good news is, that many of you have gardens and enjoy planting a range of things throughout the year. What I am challenging you to consider, is that when you get into the garden in the coming weeks, you plant things that will help the bees in your area. While most plants produce something of use to bees, some plants produce better pollen or nectar than others. Take the time to find out which plants are bee-friendly, and add some of those to your home environment. Simply put, today's lesson is that participating in the mission of the church, being part of the work of sustaining life in our world, of caring for creation, can be as simple as planting some marigolds. Amen.