



“So Jesus went with them.”

(Luke 7:6) Abridged text of a sermon preached by Mike King

Two phrases are central to my understanding of the World Church Relationships team’s role within the Methodist Church in Britain:

“Mission is more than development; transformation is more than progress” (European Methodist Council 2011)

The presence of Jesus Christ, flooding the opportunity with the gifts of the Spirit, releases so much more than we alone can achieve. My text from the story of the Centurion’s Servant (Luke 7:1-10) may be the simplest sentence in the passage, but also the most profound.

“So Jesus went with them.” (7:6)

What is it that Jesus responds to?

From Macedonia in northern Greece, Paul and Silas, following their vision to “come over and help us”, cross over from Troas to Philippi, baptise Lydia and begin the spread of Christianity into Europe – one of the pivotal moments in religious and indeed political history. It is an important moment of spreading God’s love.

“So Jesus went with them.”

Thinking about European Christianity’s beginnings in Greek Macedonia, I recall a man of modern Macedonia, former President Boris Trajkowski. A man of stature exuding natural authority, he understood too that he was under greater authority.

Boris was born into a Methodist family in an overwhelmingly Orthodox Church country. Passionate about his faith, Boris became a Local Preacher and qualified as a lawyer. In the early 1990s, in the aftermath of the Kosovo war and confined by the Communist government to a remote village, he took care of an impoverished Roma church in the Strumica Valley. Later, as President of Macedonia in 1999,

he introduced himself to me as a Methodist preacher first and President of his country second!

Sustained by his faith throughout the lengthy NATO-brokered peace deal in 2001, ending violence and preventing a civil war, Boris called for integration of all parties in the life of the nation, receiving the Methodist Peace Award. Tragically killed in an air crash in 2004, he was truly a man of authority, humility and great faith.

Back to the story of the Centurion’s servant.

Luke’s gospel is truly explosive, including the only account of Jesus’s first sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4). What angered his fellow townspeople was not his text from Isaiah, but his exposition. Reminding them of two stories of miracles amongst Gentiles, he challenged them to accept that foreigners as much as the “chosen people” are loved by God. Who then is beyond God’s loving care or plan? That’s why they wanted to stone Jesus!

Through the following chapters we are drawn into two big themes: authority and the place of foreigners (non-Jews) in God’s plan. The testimony of Luke’s gospel and Acts is that Christianity was well on the way to becoming a world brand by the end of the first century AD.

In Luke 7, the story of the Centurion’s servant, an unlikely non-Jew shows huge compassion for a servant. In Roman law a slave had no rights and was literally at the mercy of his owner. Yet amazingly, a Roman soldier shows unexpected concern for his slave! Basic kindness transcends ethnic and national boundaries and speaks to the heart of humanity. Kindness, a fruit of the Spirit and close to the heart of God, is transformative.

“So Jesus went with them.” He responds in love.

The Centurion was also a humble man – not with a false modesty, but with a deep and sober awareness of his capabilities and limitations, for God has not given everyone the same gifts and graces. Doubtless an outstanding soldier of great authority, this man knew that what Jesus could do was way beyond his powers. In Christ in his Church, William Temple writes that humility: “does not mean ... having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom [to] give your whole mind and thought to... the fulfilment of God’s will in Christian love.” The Centurion showed such humility and knew Jesus could heal his servant. He didn’t have the power himself – but he knew a man who could!

For me, this story says that Christians should be open to the faith and insights of people different from ourselves – no-one has the whole truth of God.

That we would do well to practise humility, going with kindness in our hearts, not in our own strength but realising that God will go with us.

“So Jesus went with them.”

Faith, humility and kindness – I saw that in Boris Trajkowski,

I read about it throughout Luke’s gospel and Acts.

For all of us engaged in mission, in the UK, Europe and worldwide, faith, humility and kindness are key ingredients in any mission recipe book.

And to move mission beyond development, transformation beyond progress, may Jesus go with us too.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

by Jenny Brown

Creator God,
You loved the world into life.
Forgive us when our dreams of the future
are shaped by anything other than glimpses of a kingdom
of justice, peace and an end to poverty.

God of Mission: **Make us channels of your justice and peace**

Incarnate God,
you taught us to speak out for what is right.
Make us content with nothing less than a world
that is transformed into the shape of love,
where poverty shall be no more.

God of Mission: **Make us channels of your justice and peace**

Breath of God,
let there be abundant life.
Inspire us with the vision of poverty over,
and give us the faith, courage and will to make it happen.

God of Mission: **Make us channels of your justice and peace**

Lord of all, we pray for all countries in Europe where Christians are in the minority. We ask for your Spirit to guide and strengthen your people in those countries, enabling them to show your love and grace to those around them so that lives and communities are transformed.

God of Mission: **Make us channels of your justice and peace**

Loving God, grant wisdom to members of the European Parliament and all others working in the institutions of the European Union, as they consider issues of justice such as tax, climate change, financial markets, human rights and all forms of exploitation. Under your guidance and leading may the European Union help make your kingdom a reality.

God of Mission: **Make us channels of your justice and peace**

God of all the world, give us wisdom in troubled times.
As we realise how fragile our systems of security are,
remind us how much more fragile they are for those who have nothing.
As we talk of financial crisis,
remind us of the true financial crisis for those who go to bed hungry.
As we face challenges over our own resources,
remind us that you teach us to share what we have.
Inspire us to live in a Christ-like way,
and to bring your peace to a world in turmoil.

God of Mission: **Make us channels of your justice and peace**

AMEN