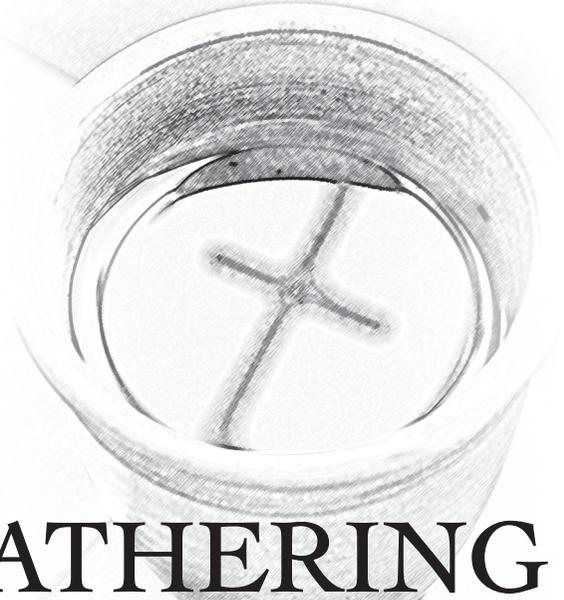


GATHERING AT GOD'S TABLE



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THE FIVE MARKS OF
MISSION IN THE FEAST
OF FAITH

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SPCK

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For Bob Ladehoff, who first piqued my interest in the Millennium Development Goals, the year of Jubilee, and the machinations of the Lambeth Conference.

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Introduction

Most English speakers know something about King Arthur. He presided over a round table in Camelot, where he hosted feasts surrounded by brave and noble knights, whose mission was justice and peace. *Le Morte D'Arthur*, the fifteenth-century compilation of stories about Arthur and his legendary court, reports that his tomb bears the inscription, *Hic jacet Arturus, rex quondam, rexque futurus*: Here lies Arthur, the once and future king. It's a resounding echo of King Jesus, who will return in glory.

In this book, I want to explore the once and future mission of the Jesus people. Beginning with King Arthur seems appropriate, since my own Christian tradition, the Episcopal branch of the Anglican Communion, has roots that spring from the same English soil as the Arthurian legend. The Anglican tradition challenges believers to a radical way of understanding the meaning of mission—being sent out to proclaim the Gospel. It's a challenge not just for Anglicans, but for everyone. The meaning of mission is central to our lives as Christians and indeed to all people of faith. What will storytellers in future generations say about the community of believers? *Missi sunt Christiani, ecclesia quondam, ecclesiaque futuris*? That Christians were once sent out to be the Body of Christ—but will they also be the Body of Christ of the future?

Maybe it's odd to begin a book about church mission by invoking King Arthur. But maybe not. We could go down the lanes and byroads of literature and history, unearthing the myriad ways Christians have echoed the great stories of our faith in their own cultures and contexts. That work isn't finished, of course, and it won't be finished this side of the Second Coming. The way in which the great salvation story has been told or re-echoed in different cultures reflects both contemporary understandings of the meaning of a faithful Christian life and the eternal meaning of abundant life.

I'd like to explore some of the missional history of Anglicanism and indeed all of Christianity and see what it looks like to live a faithful Christian life, sent out by Jesus to love God and neighbor as self. We'll look at mission as it rose both from the Church of England and from the church universal. And we'll peer into the future, for a glimpse of how we might grow into an expanding vision of mission playing out in the particular contexts in which Christians live and move and have their being.

But what exactly is mission? It's about far more than people packing up their belongings and going to Africa or Asia to baptize non-Christians. The meaning of mission is much deeper and broader than that. The word comes from the Latin verb *mitto*, to send. It's the work that Jesus modeled himself and then sent his disciples out to do—feeding, healing, and teaching. The word “mass,” and the “dismissal” at the end of the service, are derived from the old Latin command at the close of a service of Eucharist or holy communion: *Ite, missa est*. It means something like, “Go, you are sent.” Or as a former bishop of New York used to say, “Get up, get out, and get lost.” You've been fed—now get out there and lose your life in service to the world. That's what mission is all about, and you don't need a passport to do it.

The most frequently cited gospel mandate about mission is Matthew 28:19–20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." Mission is evangelical—it's about spreading the good news and forming followers of Jesus.

But mission has a broader meaning, too, particularly as Jesus sets out in an earlier part of Matthew (25:34–40):

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Mission also means caring for the vulnerable. It's a meaning that emerged in Jesus's first public teaching, his inaugural address in the synagogue at Nazareth, when he read from the prophet Isaiah. It's Jesus's own mission statement, a summary of what he himself has been sent to do:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up

the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.
The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.
Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has
been fulfilled in your hearing."

(LUKE 4:18–21)

Mission is primarily about how Christians are meant to live their lives, and what actions are asked of them in relation to their neighbors. We might say mission is how to love God through loving our neighbors. The Anglican Communion promulgated a framework for thinking about mission some quarter century ago, called the Five Marks of Mission.¹ It's a helpful outline, particularly in its breadth:

To proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Share the ancient dream of God, spoken by the prophets, about what the world is supposed to look like. That involves living in right relationship with God and one another and all creation. In that world no one goes hungry, the sick receive care and healing, no one studies war anymore, and all live together in peace and justice. Jesus shows us the road toward that reign of God, toward *shalom* or *salaam* ("peace" in Hebrew and Arabic).

To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers. This is about forming disciples of Jesus, people who will share the work of building a world of *shalom* and who will invite others into those right relationships.

To respond to human need with loving service. Anciently called "corporal works of mercy," this mark of mission is our response to suffering in the world around us as we do the kind of feeding and healing work that Jesus did himself.

To seek to transform unjust structures of society. This aspect of mission is prophetic work, advocacy, politics in the way we more often use the word: Jesus's turning over the tables in the Temple (Matthew 21:12), his parables about rendering to Caesar (Mark 12:17) and the widow's mite (Luke 21:1–4), as well as the vineyard parables about employment and a living wage (Matthew 20). To many Christians this can seem like "secular" work, or too dangerous for religious

folk. But it is at the root of our Christian mission to build a society of peace and justice.

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. This is an area of mission long ignored, but it's intrinsic to a world where all have enough to eat and the opportunity to live in peace. The biblical charge to "*be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth*" (Genesis 1:28) has often been misread. That word "dominion" has been grossly misunderstood to mean "take possession of" and "use for your own personal and usually selfish ends." The word is actually related to *domus*, house, and should invite us to think about caring for the earth as a householder—it is husbanding and housekeeping work.

Mission has not always—or even often—been understood in this broader way in previous centuries. Indeed, Christianity has often equated mission with proselytization. The earliest Christian missionary efforts were about spreading the good news of Jesus and were usually accompanied by efforts to relieve hunger and heal sickness. After the Roman emperor Constantine became a Christian in the early fourth century and made it legal for Roman subjects to be Christians, the mission scene began to change. Christianity began to be associated with citizenship, sometimes leading to forced conversions. The monastic movement emerged at least in part as a reaction to state religion. Mission opportunities expanded in monastic communities, with the scribal work of copying biblical manuscripts, monastic houses of hospitality for travelers, and the development of agricultural practices better suited to local conditions. Gregor Mendel's genetic work on pea plants was a late outgrowth of that kind of practical relief and development work—a concrete example of mission in action.

Yet all through this history is a strong theme of conversion of pagans and infidels—and I use those terms advisedly. Non-Christians were often seen as objects for the action of the Church, rather than

subjects in and with whom God might already be at work. Indeed, much of the global exploration beginning in the fifteenth century was underlain by religious and royal orders to colonize and appropriate lands that were not occupied by Christians. Non-Christian territories and peoples were fair game, and European powers looked to the Church to oversee the dividing up of territory. The Doctrine of Discovery,² affirming the right of Christians to appropriate land belonging to infidels, has undergirded legal principles of property ownership in the United States since a Supreme Court decision in 1823. The related concept of manifest destiny provided motivation for dispossessing native peoples of lands and cultures, if not their very lives.

The enormities of Christian mission are legion. And yet, in God's economy, there have also been abundant blessings. Selfless service, even unto death, of countless missionaries over the centuries has been offered to heal and educate, feed and shelter, deliver slaves and prisoners, and invite fellow human beings into greater relationship with God and neighbor.

THE MEANING OF MISSION — REMEMBERING THE PAST

The Church of England began to engage in foreign mission soon after its explorers established new venues for colonization and settlement. The first official British missionary went to Goa, India, in 1519.³ By the late seventeenth century well-developed mission plans for India were emerging, naming seminaries, bishops, and theological and linguistic training as priorities, along with the ongoing work of evangelism and church building.

English missionary societies began to spring up as the seventeenth century gave way to the eighteenth, with the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) established in 1698

and 1701, respectively. The SPCK focused on printing and distributing religious literature, and on basic education for poor children, both boys and girls. It emerged from the bishop of London's sending of Thomas Bray to Maryland to examine the state of the Anglican Church on American shores. Bray sent back a report commenting on its lack of spiritual vitality, and he eventually went to work establishing parish libraries for the edification of clergy and people in American congregations.

The SPG was instrumental in supporting the presence and growth of the Church of England in the American colonies, both by providing clergy stipends and by encouraging missionary efforts with unevangelized peoples, including slaves.

We mustn't neglect the influence of the Wesley brothers on Anglican mission, particularly in the American colonies. John and Charles Wesley, the Anglican priests who founded Methodism, sailed to the colony of Georgia in 1735, at the invitation of Governor Oglethorpe, hoping to missionize the Native Americans. Their encounter with Moravians on the voyage to the colonies was also a significant chapter in the developing strand of evangelical Anglicanism.

The principal Anglican evangelical mission society was founded in 1799 as the Society for Missions in Africa and the East, though it came to be known as the Church Mission Society (CMS). Among its founders were William Wilberforce and others who sought to end the slave trade. This was the first major Anglican mission group to reach indigenous peoples in Asia and in significant reaches of Africa.

The last of the major British mission societies to be formed was the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), inspired by David Livingstone's lectures on his return to England from Africa in the 1850s. Founded in 1857 to promote an Anglican presence in central Africa and to work for an end to the slave trade, it was the first English society to use a model based on sending missionary bishops, and the first to train black Africans as priests. The UMCA

