

What is mission?

“Your mission, should you choose to accept it is...” If you’ve watch Mission Impossible films you may recognise this quote as the way spy Ethan Hunt is asked to take on an assignment. In his case it is something which will save the world and usually involves great da thrilling action.



But what if we were asked this question: “St Martin’s, your mission, should you choose to accept it is....?” What assignment would we expect to be given? This autumn, we will be concluding the journey that we began earlier in the year to produce a Mission Action Plan. We’ll be setting out what our mission as a church is to be over the next few years. But what is this ‘mission’ that we are talking about?

The former Archbishop of Canterbury had a very simple definition of mission: “mission is seeing where God is at work in the world and joining in”. I like this because it very clearly recognises that the church should only be doing the things which God is involved in. It is a reminder that the things we do as a church are not about getting glory or praise for ourselves but about God’s glory being seen. It also tells us that mission is not about going off on our own but is about working in partnership with God outside the walls of our church buildings. As we were reminded at Easter by Fr Dennis, it’s about recognising that Jesus isn’t trapped in our building but is on the loose in Droylsden and our job is to find him and be with him wherever he is.

However, great as I find this definition of mission, it’s not very specific and doesn’t actually address the question ‘What does mission involve?’ Helpfully, the Anglican church has come up with what it calls “Five marks of mission” which I think provides a much fuller answer to what the mission is that we are being asked to accept. Our Church has recognised that God’s mission is wide-ranging and that different churches will find different aspects of mission appealing and engaging. As I’ve been reflecting on how we make sure that our Mission Action Plan is one that truly is about seeing where God is at work in our parish, I think that these five marks will be a helpful way of enabling us to think about this. I’ll be preaching about each of the marks on five Sundays over the autumn, but here is a brief introduction:

The Five Marks of Mission are:

- * To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*
- * To teach, baptise and nurture new believers*
- * To respond to human need by loving service*
- * To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation*
- * To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth*

If like me, you struggle to remember lists, the Five Marks of Mission can be summarised as: **Tell:** the good news of God; **Teach:** people about God; **Tend:** lovingly our brothers and sisters; **Transform:** all in our world that is contrary to God’s will; **Treasure:** God’s creation

This is what our mission is to be, this is what God is calling us to do and this is what we are to join with him in doing. In Mission Impossible, Ethan Hunt was given the choice to accept the mission set out before him.

As Christians we don't have a choice whether or not to accept God's mission. Through our baptism, through partaking in Holy Communion, we are part of the Body of Christ. If we faithfully live out this calling, we are automatically part of God's mission, doing God's work in our world. Our job as a Church is to decide how God wants us to do this at this time and this place and that's what our Mission Action Plan will set out as we complete it this autumn.