



**SERMONS**

by

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**Date: 19th August 2018 Preacher: Anthony Boateng**

**Bible readings: Mark 4:26-34**

**Title: "Our Methodist Calling: Interrogate but Reaffirm!"**

This morning, we're presented with a parable by Jesus about the Kingdom of God at a relatively early stage in His ministry.

In this parable, we meet a landowner who has taken control of his father's aging land since his death 12 years ago. His land is large but experiencing a year-on-year decline. In the past, some of his seeds have started brightly, only for some strong and powerful seeds, dishonestly planted, to choke them at a later stage in the process. Additionally, the fact that workers are thin on the ground and a disappointing recruitment process has not helped. As a result, existing staff skew towards an older demographic who are less mobile. Some parts of the estate are also old and in poor repair.

Despite all the challenges, experts and critics have in the past described some of his trees as "stunning herbs with potentially strong large branches for all birds of the air to nest under its shade."

So you can imagine all the frustration and dilemmas he must be confronted with. Does he restructure management or curtail some? Does he grow more seeds or pull out the bad existing seeds and throw them into a burning fire? Does he diversify or consolidate? Does he respond in haste or remain patient until harvest?

How does this relate to us, brothers and sisters? In a way, this parable is similar to the many challenges that confront our Methodist church. And we can see this when we look at the statistics for Mission report to the 2017 conference.

It shows that we have lost 100,000 memberships and worship attendance in 12 years. It shows that we have a low acceptance of candidate numbers (19 in this Connexional year). It shows that there has been a significant shift from young people being accepted into the ministry with an average age group of 50 years. It shows that we lack experience and confidence in evangelism.

It shows that there is an aging profile of membership and attendance has shifted towards an older demographic. It shows that there is a missing age group of about 20 to 45 years in our churches. It shows that more people are saying they do not believe in God than they say they are Christian.

Maybe like me, you wonder why this is the case when we have vast resources at our disposal and other churches are witnessing record growth. Maybe like me, you're wondering if we're children of a lesser God, if we worship a lesser God. Maybe like me, you know what it's like to feel like the elephant in the room. I believe, like the parable, the feeling is the same; it's a state of frustration, anxiety, and bewilderment.

**\*\*Short Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOoGhXBQJ70&t=117s>) – The Methodist Church – Our Calling\*\***

We will now watch a video that has been put together by the Connexional Leaders' Forum (CLF), the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC), and the council in response to the presentation of the Statistics for Mission at the 2017 conference. It offers some thoughts on the way forward and will help us to interrogate as well as reaffirm our Methodist calling.

## A Summary

*"If we are worshipping and we are living out God's holiness in our life, we will start building those relationships where it is possible to start sharing the deep things of faith with other people. Our calling is all tied in together, and it is all about living out God's love for us in the world" – Rachael Lampard - JPIT*

I believe Rachael is really describing the sequential process to natural growth. This is clearly not something you do in isolation; you have to do it holistically with a greater purpose to increase the awareness of God's presence.

Mark tells us in verse 29 of the gospel reading: *"For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come."*

I believe what Jesus is doing in this text is bringing us to reality by describing the natural as well as mysterious process of growth, "first the blade, then the head, then the full grain..." In other words, Jesus is saying first we need to interrogate our worship, seek to learn and care more about God's world, seek to be a good neighbour to people in need, and challenge injustice in our churches and beyond our walls, and finally, to make more followers of Jesus Christ. When we do this, there is a strong chance that we will begin to see the harvest. And even if we don't see the benefits straight away, we have to keep in mind that it's about laying a foundation for the future generation.

So what are the main points we can take away from this morning? Brothers and sisters, I'm suggesting to us that we should not accept the state of our Church as it is today. A Church that's so mechanical and structured in ways that Christ is only worshipped or mentioned occasionally in a close setting. I believe it goes against our calling. I believe this morning God is urging us to reaffirm our calling, and bear fruit by uniting as a Church to make more followers of Jesus Christ through evangelism. And we do this by talking to people, listening to people, forming meaningful relationships with people, loving people, and connecting with them in the joys and sorrows of their life.

Brothers and sisters, I believe God is urging us to interrogate the state of our churches, the injustices in our churches and community, establish the facts to what's going on, and the structural problems that confront our churches, and work to reaffirm our calling.

Let us be like the Berean Jews as recorded in Acts Chapter 17 verse 11-13. I'm suggesting that it is time to unite as brothers and sisters in Christ and call a spade a spade. We need to remember that Justice has been core to Methodism right from the beginning and our church is not excused from it.

Throughout history, there have been times when Methodists have stood up because they've realized there is something unjust going on. We need to start interrogating the makeup of our churches and the leadership structures.

Like, why are we not able to bring people from different backgrounds into one place to worship? Why don't we have adequate young ministers? What training and nurturing are we offering them? Are we really enabling them to flourish? There's a famous quote from Martin Niemoller who said:

*"First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionist, and I did not speak out because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they*

*came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for”.*

The moral of this quote is that when we see injustice, we must speak against it; don't pretend it does not concern us because you could be next. We can take some inspiration from Nathan when he rebukes David in 2 Samuel 12.

Finally, brothers and sisters, let us trust in God, believing that even though we are small in numbers, aging, and increasingly under attack from the secular world, we can overcome and achieve great things. Let us be bold as we seek to reaffirm our Methodist calling, showing greater urgency and confidence in the word of God – and share it widely and repeatedly; trusting that it is living and active. It has great power to change lives, to transform whole communities, to influence entire nations.

Gracious God, give us strength, courage, joy, and the Spirit of Love to fight for justice and to make your Kingdom known to all around us. Amen.