

The Jigsaw

The first week of our break was spent in Tarbert, Lochfyne. Like much of Scotland, a place of incredible beauty, the rolling seas and steep hills, majestic coast line and ever-changing colours with the different weather that we get daily.

Both Susan and myself were born and brought up in this village – in fact generations on both sides of the family are from this small village. We lived across the harbour from each other. At the bells on Hogmanay Susan's family would wave a white dish towel out of their window and we would respond with ours across the harbour. So, spending time in Tarbert, is always a delight, a walk down memory lane and a reconnecting with the past.

But how good it is to spend time with our mums and particularly as they are much frailer than they used to be.

My sister Catherine bought a jigsaw for my mother, not that my mum can put it together, Parkinsons has stopped this, but so that her carers when they visit, can have a wee go of putting together this 2000-piece complicated jigsaw of Tarbert harbour.

It's a beautiful photo, it was taken by a local photographer and he commissioned it to be a jigsaw.

So, when down at my mums, I gave the carers a wee hand with the jigsaw as their time is limited when popping in during the day, but between themselves and myself, we managed to build the border of the jigsaw – all the straight pieces. So, we put together the framework of the jigsaw which covers my mum's large dining table.

The border was a good place to start, it gave us an idea of the size and scope of the work needing done.

This made me think about frameworks and how our lives are often like a complicated jigsaw, many different pieces and often not all connecting.

A framework is good to have in our lives. A framework that gives boundaries and helps us to build our bigger picture.

What might that border, frame work be in our lives as Christians, as followers of Christ?

The writer of Psalm 103 v8-18 certainly had a framework to his life.

The psalmist's life was framed in the context of God's love.

Likewise, Jesus clearly pointed people to the love of God. He pointed people to love God and to love their neighbour and to love their enemy.

This was the framework that he had in his life. Unashamedly, he called his followers to do likewise.

So, what an incredible border this is when we stretch this framework of God's love around our lives, what does it do, it gives us protection, boundaries, a higher goal and purpose, a constant reference to work from.

What is your framework?

Have you thought about your boundaries recently?

How do we create this framework? How do we put it together?

It begins when we begin to experience God's love for us and to allow his love to come into our lives.

We meet this love in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – We meet this love when we come to an understanding that God came into our world, to live and die for us. It's all about his gift of incredible grace and mercy.

Let us sing together the chorus 197 – *As We are Gathered Jesus is Here...*

The Jigsaw Continued

Picture the scene....

Your first service as a minister and the congregation takes you afterwards to the top of a cliff to throw you off! That's what happened to Jesus! What a start!

Wow! How to get rid of your ministers!

So, Jesus unrolls the scroll. And directs them to the words of Isaiah the prophet.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me

For he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor

He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released

That the blind will see

That the oppressed will be set free

That the time of the Lord's favour had come."

After the border of the jig saw was completed, at my mum's, I then started separating the different parts of the jigsaw, the sky, the sea, the boats, the harbour, the shops – five different sections that all connected together – so that the carers can work away at each part as they pop in and out of my mum's and slowly build the picture.

In our reading today we see 5 Marks of Mission, which all belong together, for they are all part of the bigger picture – the Kingdom of God.

Our task is to construct the 5 Marks together bit by bit – it takes time, patience and work to put a jigsaw together, and so it is with the Kingdom of God, it is a work in progress but will find its completion in the coming of Jesus.

Jesus has set us a Mission to be Kingdom builders.

The General Assembly of the CofS decided last year to adopt the 5 Marks of Mission which have become the benchmark for Mission in the CofS over the last 20 years.

With all the issues facing our churches, the church knows that we need to lead in Mission more than ever.

Mission is now back on the agenda. It should never have been off it.

And the 5 Marks of Mission are the building blocks for our church jigsaw.

So, what are the five marks of Mission?

They all begin with the letter T.

Mission is about Telling.

Mission is about Teaching.

Mission is about Tending.

Mission is about Treasuring.

Mission is about Transforming.

The new Presbytery Plan and further development within the church, will all the ask the question, how are we faring in those 5 areas of Mission.

Mission is not something that we have invented. Mission is at the heart of God. The Church is not a human invention. The Church is God's plan for the world. Jesus said, *"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not stand against it."*

Someone described mission simply as this, "It's about finding out what God is doing and joining Him in it!"

If the church depended solely on us, then it would fail miserably. For the church to succeed we must look to God for guidance and strength. It is His church after all. God can manage perfectly well without us but he chooses to invite us to complete His jigsaw.

His Mission is to ultimately save the world. His mission is to save us for all eternity. He invites us to be part of this Mission with Him.

The first mark of Mission. **Jesus is telling the Good News.** He is telling his own people, in his own town, that he is the proclaimer of Good News. That he is anointed to preach this message of Good News. Anointed simply means that God's blessing was upon him, that God's Spirit is speaking through him.

Jesus is first and foremost a proclaimer of Good News.

We still need proclaimers of the Gospel today!

When the *Proclaimers* Scottish pop duo was looking for a name, they went for the name *Proclaimers* because they wanted a strong name. They wanted something with a Gospel feel to it that indicated strength in the vocal delivery, a sort of spiritual element, they said.... These boys tried to achieve a social message with a Gospel feel.

They were proclaiming a message through their music.

Jesus came to proclaim a message also – a message about God. He knew exactly the message that he was called to bring.

We have it before us today.

He came to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed and the announcing of the Lord's favour.

Isn't that Good News!

The Apostle Paul wrote, *how can people be saved if they don't hear?*

The church has always been built on the proclamation of the Good News and that is our building block. Take the message away and we are threadbare!

The challenge today is how do we proclaim this message? Yes, of course we still need to hear the message on a Sunday. But in our world today there are many other means to proclaim it. That's our task: to discover those ways. Are we telling the message?

Then we find that Jesus teaches. He spent three years invested in his disciples' spiritual lives. Jesus didn't try to teach thousands – yes, he often spoke to thousands, but the more intimate teaching and spiritual development came within his small group of disciples, for he knew that to invest in this group would mean that they would be able to take up His mission and go forward when he was no longer with them!

Think of the Sermon on the Mount and the depth of teaching and its quality – Jesus was a teacher and for us to grow as Christians, we need more than the message proclaimed on a Sunday morning, that’s not enough. It’s like having a meal once a week and fasting for the other 6 days! We need nurtured or as the Apostle Paul said, we need to be fed spiritual milk in order to grow. So, the second **T – Teaching**. Are we hearing the message?

At the heart of the ministry of Jesus was tending to others. He had a heart of compassion. He was selfless in everything and he cared for the poor and the weak and the marginalised and the sinner. “To respond to human need by loving service” is how the CofE describes the third mark of mission. T- which comes under the umbrella of Tending. When we show compassion, we are following the example of our Lord Jesus, “who went about doing good to all”. Acts 10v38.

This is what our churches are built on – not just telling and teaching but also tending and we see that in our reading today. Jesus said he has come to bring good news to the poor. So, the third mark of Mission is to **Tend to others**.

The Christian faith is about transformation. Christ came to this world to transform it. He came to bring God's Kingdom into this world. He came to transform darkness into light and he came to transform people's lives. When we have compassion, it moves us to reach out to others in action.

He has come to make the blind see and the oppressed set free. The Christian faith is a faith that transforms.

The final mark is - Jesus treasured God's creation. He lived close to nature and he observed the birds and the flowers. They were important to him, in fact he told his disciples...*study and learn from creation*. Creation is our teacher and Jesus called his coming the time of the Lord's Jubilee. The Jubilee was a time when creation took a rest and creation was given a time to repair and to heal. This was the spiritual thinking of the Jewish people. Our land today needs a Jubilee, a time to repair and to heal! This is the fifth and final mark of mission – treasuring God's creation. If we are honest the church has not been that good through the centuries at this final T. But now in the last few decades we have wakened up to again treasure God's creation.

So, 5 marks of Mission, all crucial, all creating a framework of mission – markers for the work of building God's kingdom and the work of building our church.

It is vitally important that these 5 Marks of Mission are embedded into God's church and that they become our purposes and our reason for being a church.

So, my mum's jigsaw is a work in progress, in some children's jigsaws you see on the box 'for ages to 2-3 years'. God willing, that might be the length of time that the carers will need to build my mum's jigsaw and the wonderful thing is, it is not done by one person but a whole group of carers all joining in together. Every little piece is as important as the next one.

So, the Kingdom of God is to be built not just by one person or a small team it's for us all, we all have a part to play and some will feel more called to one part than the other and all have an important part in

Telling, Teaching, Tending, Transforming and Treasuring the Kingdom of God.

Amen.