

## Evotional

**Sermon title: “Bessels’ Mission.”**

**Speaker: Neil Durling.**

**Bible passage: Matthew 28:16-20.**

**Date: 2.3.14.**

### **Message:**

**Mission Impossible!** I’m sure a lot of us watched the series and films in the past. And it nearly always started with the recorded message: “Your mission, should you choose to accept it...” They always accepted it and always did it: Not that impossible then!

**Vision and mission are different:** A vision is an ungraspable dream which inspires us. A mission is how we try to make a vision reality (we take steps towards that which we know we will never achieve this side of eternity).

**Jesus’ vision and mission:** Jesus’ vision was the kingdom of God, which Jesus taught about before his death and then for forty days after his resurrection. He was consumed by the desire to see God’s rule (love, inclusion, forgiveness, justice and mystery) here on earth as it is in heaven. But what mission did he give his disciples? We see it in Matthew 28:16-20:

1. **They worshipped, but some doubted (17):** Some doubted whilst they worshipped! Phew! We don’t have to have it all together then! Worship is key to glimpsing the kingdom of God.
2. **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go...” (18-19):** Jesus tells them that he has authority to make this happen and that he’s going to do it through them – so get going! And the good news is that he will always be with us and in us through the Holy Spirit. Another part of the disciples’ mission is to go and share Jesus with others.
3. **Make disciples of all nations (19):** Jesus wants disciples, not just decisions. The difference? They will be baptised and taught to obey Jesus’ commands.

**Current Church culture?** In 2005 Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist conducted a survey of 3,000 American teenage Christians from Bible believing and teaching churches. The findings were published in *Soul searching: The religious & spiritual lives of American teenagers*. They used the term Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (deism is an 18<sup>th</sup> century idea of a distant God who is selectively available to take care of my needs) to sum up what they found. The five main points of belief were:

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

I hope we’d all agree with numbers 1 and 2 but not the others. Sadly, as I look at my own soul, I see much of numbers 3-5 reflected there also.

Kenda Creasy Dean, in *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, writes: "The problem does not seem to be that churches are teaching young people badly, but that we are doing an exceedingly good job of teaching youth what we really believe, namely, that Christianity is not a big deal, that God requires little, and the church is a helpful social institution filled with nice people..."

There is, potentially, a huge chasm between the mission Jesus set those first followers and what we experience as the Christian faith today...

**Bessels’ mission:** *We will try and do this [our vision] in our outreach, worship and practical discipleship.* It sometimes seems impossible doesn’t it? And there are times when we don’t accept it...

**But what do we mean by the terms worship, practical discipleship outreach?** I emailed over twenty people from Bessels and received a variety of answers. Differing viewpoints cause tension as most of us are sure that we’re right (!). It takes a large blob of humility to listen to one another and sometimes accept that we might be wrong or out of step with the times in which we live. Here are a few thoughts from me...

1. **Worship: The Greek word for worship (poskuneis) means** “to throw oneself down.” Loving God is embarrassing, whether it be in the week or on a Sunday in the church building. Worship comes from a Latin word meaning “worthship” ; “to give God credit for who he is”. If we look at worship in a narrow sense, as what happens on Sundays, we know that worship is not based on my personal taste, if my life is good or if I feel up for it. I challenge you to imagine Jesus on a chair on the stage at Bessels – He is the audience. This would do away with a great deal of my griping – how about yours? None of us are spectators in worship whom the worship group, Bible reader or preacher need to “get into the mood” for God. We are all participators and Jesus is the joyful spectator who welcomes our worship of him. Part of our mission is to be consumed by Jesus.
2. **Practical discipleship:** Many religious communities in Jesus’ day retreated from the world to remain pure and holy. This is far from Jesus’ way. Christians lived amongst others, sharing their lives with them and so should we. It was in Antioch (Acts 11) that onlookers called followers of The Way “Christians”. It was a nickname which means “Little Jesus”. I want to be a

Little Jesus, don't you? I think a way to assist in this is to make our teaching/learning/discussion both slower and simpler. I think we should take our time as we look at passages of scripture and topics of faith. There is a culture of "getting through stuff" and moving on to the next thing. How about if we dwelt in the basics of our faith more – forgiveness, prayer, reading the Bible, loving God and our neighbour, trusting God in the tough times, etc.? And when I say simple, I don't mean shallow; rather, I mean having more practical ways to learn together how to be a Little Jesus. Does what I hear on Sunday make sense come Monday?

3. **Outreach:** The word "sent" appears in the Bible over six hundred and fifty times. It is mostly about God sending us. And as we know "Church" in Greek literally means "Sent ones". Whilst in prison awaiting his execution, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in *Letter and papers from prison* the following: "The Church has fought for self-preservation as though it were an end in itself and has thereby lost its chance to speak a word of reconciliation to mankind and the world at large... The Church is only the Church when it exists for others." My challenge is for each of us to find our "hook" that enables us, in a natural manner, to be able to bring God into conversations when it is relevant. I am all for sharing our faith through deeds but also believe equally as strongly that we cannot side-step sharing our faith when the opportunity presents itself. This is key to our mission as a church and individuals.

**The triangle:** Worship, practical discipleship and outreach: In, up and out. I believe we should have these in every church group and activity that we're a part of.

**The reality is this:** The way a church "leans" shapes it. Each of the three prongs of our mission is important but all churches and people will lean in one direction more than the others.

**I think we should lean into outreach...** Why do I say this? Because Jesus did – his emphasis was on seeing the kingdom of God now. I think that if we lean into outreach it will send us back to God in worship as we see his kingdom activity. At the same time, it will thrust us into practical discipleship as we are asked questions that we don't know the answers to and have to search the scriptures diligently for no-nonsense answers.

**"Your mission, should you choose to accept it..." Well?**

### Questions:

1. What rings true with you about Moralistic Therapeutic Deism?
2. How can we counter-act this view of God and faith?
3. What do you think of Neil's comment on worship?
4. What do you think of Neil's comment on practical discipleship?
5. What do you think of Neil's comment on outreach?
6. What do you think of Neil's comment about leaning into outreach which will enliven our worship and deepen our practical discipleship?

### Prayer:

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, please help us at Bessels to accept our mission and, in your strength, see some fruit. Amen.