

“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.”¹ That is, Luke’s Gospel is what Jesus began; Acts is Luke’s narrative of how his people continued what he began.²

So, what did Jesus actually begin, and what on earth are we doing to continue it? This is the one question that should be driving all we do, say and pray. It is at the heart, or if you like, the engine room of mission. It is that which motivates us and moves us on, grounded in faith, enriched in worship, but sent into the world.

Do we have that balance right? Some like to simply ‘hear the prayers being read’. I’ve heard variations on that: “I’ve come to hear the mass.” *Attende!*: *Hear us*, is very much at the heart of the ancient prayers. In the book of Psalms, the request to *attende* is usually directed at God.

We hear, but do we actually listen? Jesus at one stage made that distinction. *Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!*³ We hear many things if we are blessed with good hearing, but to listen is something else. It requires us to actually engage: to become one in communicating.

We are called not to hear the mass, or hear the divine scriptures being read, no, we are called to listen, to attend, to become one. The words abide in us, and we in them. They were so important that in the temptation in the desert, Jesus said, “You cannot live on bread alone, but only on the very words that come from God.”⁴ God is speaking to us, but are we listening?

Our words, set in the beautiful and traditional ways of the Church are meant to inspire, feed and encourage us. It is meant to move us. In some parts of the parish, all our senses are engaged in worship. We see; we hear; we touch, respectfully and in accordance with the rules; we smell, and finally, we taste. It is a holistic experience coming to Church.

Having been fed by the liturgy, we’re told to get out there and share. We arrive, we attend, we commune, and then are sent. At the long masses in which Archbishop Young in Hobart unleashed his famous hour-long sermons, I could fully understand the enthusiasm of the faithful when the mass ended. *Ita missa est!* The mass is ended. The response, *Deo Gratis*, Thanks be to God! was usually the most enthusiastic of the day!

¹ Acts 1.1

² James Howell: <http://www.ministrymatters.com/preach/entry/8978/weekly-preaching-ascension-sunday-2018>

³ Mark 4.23, Matthew 11.15

⁴ Deuteronomy 8.3; Matthew 4.4

In our tradition, we are sent out with a task. GO. It might vary from time to time, but it is a commission. In the account of Jesus' ascension into heaven in Matthew's gospel, it is a great commission!

*Go into the world and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And remember, I am with you until the end of time.*⁵

Go: don't just sit there. You've heard, and hopefully listened. You've worshiped and praised our living and ascended God, and now, we take our part in what Luke in his second book says directly to you, Jesus began to do. That work is now entrusted to you and to me.

This work is a continuation of what has been begun that is at the core and powerhouse of our mission. Teresa of Avila, and Teresa of Calcutta both remind us that as the body of Christ, we are the eyes, ears and hands of Christ in the world. Having reached out our hands to be one in him in the mystery of our worship, we now live that out in our daily world.

Our place is here, protected by the blessing of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is in the truth of God we are blessed and live. Make them Holy, in the truth that is God; the very words that we have divinely received.

I was much encouraged by the writings of Dr Derek Browning, Moderator of the Church of Scotland as he reflected on the gospel set for today.

Jesus' mission has been to communicate knowledge of God directly to those who would listen. Christian witness requires us to be fully active on earth, but fully ready for heaven. Jesus is crystal clear that there is no escape from the reality of the world. Christians are woven into the fabric of the world, but not to become indistinguishable from it.

God sent Jesus into the world, it comes as no surprise that Christ sends us into the world. The pattern of Christ's life, and therefore the life of Christ's Church is not to escape the world, but to engage with it. This is what the faithful followers of Jesus do. This is what disciples of the Lord today are shaped to be.⁶

And so it continues beyond the ascension of our Lord, as Luke points out to you, dear Theophilus, *Lover of God*. We have work to do, and that is to continue what Jesus started. And it starts by simply listening. We are charged not to be hearers of the word, but having listened, doers of the word. How do we do it? Well, we go, and be the body of Christ in the world.

⁵ Matthew 28.19-20

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