The Lukan Model of Mission

An emphasis on the Holy Spirit

To Luke discipleship didn't consist in a simple, slavish imitation of Jesus or an attempt to reproduce the past. We can learn a lot from the story of the two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus. (Lk. 24:13-35)

Jesus is to be experienced in an entirely new manner after the Resurrection. His absence isn't a source of sad distress. Why is this? It is because the Risen Christ is with us through His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is rarely mentioned in Matthew and Mark and not mentioned in connection with mission. Luke is the theologian of the Holy Spirit. In Luke we understand that the ministry of Jesus on earth was initiated and guided by the Spirit.

This means that the initiative and guidance into mission is the work of the Holy Spirit. His witnesses will be clothed with power from on high. (Lk. 24:29 and Acts 1:8). The same Spirit in whose power Jesus went into Galilee also thrusts out His disciples. The Holy Spirit is:

- the catalyst for mission
- the guiding and driving force for mission

At every point mission is both inspired and confirmed by the Holy Spirit – usually by signs and 'wonders'. The central event is Pentecost. The Spirit had descended on Jesus at the beginning of His ministry. (Lk. 3:12) The Spirit descended on the disciples at the beginning of their ministry. (Acts 2)

The emphasis in Luke is not on a missionary command but on a promise. Roland Allen wrote in his book **Missionary Methods – St. Paul's or ours**:

"Luke fixes our attention, not on an external voice, but on an internal Spirit. This manner of command is peculiar to the Gospel. Others direct from without. Christ directs from within. Others order. Christ inspires.

This is the manner of the command in Luke's writings. He speaks not of men ... who strove to obey the last orders of a beloved master, but of men who, receiving the Spirit, were driven by the Spirit to act in accordance with the nature of that Spirit."

So the Holy Spirit guides us in mission – where we should go and how we should proceed. We must wait on the Spirit to direct us. Here are a few examples:

- Philip's meeting with the Sudanese official was through the agency of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:29)
- The conversion of Cornelius involved the Holy Spirit being poured out on this Gentile and his family. The Spirit led Peter to Cornelius. (Acts 10)
- The Spirit charged the worshipping, fasting church in Antioch to set apart Saul and Barnabas for mission and it was the Spirit who sent them on their way. (Acts 13:4)
- The Spirit prevented Paul from going deeper into Asia. (Acts 16:6)
- The Spirit directed Paul to Europe through the vision of a man from Macedonia. (Acts 16:9)

So the Holy Spirit is the catalyst of mission – the guide of mission – the inspirer of mission.

The Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of Mission but the Spirit of Power. This is true in the mission of Jesus. (Lk. 4:14) It is also true of the apostles. (Acts 1:8) It is the Holy Spirit who empowers mission. We see this through the demonstration of boldness. This is a favourite word of Luke used 8 times in Acts.

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries the Holy Spirit was seen exclusively as the agent of sanctification – which He is! During the Protestant Reformation the major emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit was in bearing witness to and interpreting the Word of God. Only more recently has there been a gradual rediscovery of the intrinsic missionary character of the Holy Spirit.

It is Luke who roots Gentile mission into its Old Testament Jewish origins. How does he do this? Jesus is first and foremost the Messiah of Israel – the Servant of Yahweh. It is precisely for this reason that he is also the Saviour of the nations! To Luke Gentile Christians never replaced Jewish Christians as the People of God. In the wake of Pentecost thousands of Jews embraced the staggering truth that all their sacred customs must give way before God's impartiality. It was into this renewed "Israel" that Gentile believers were incorporated. Luke teaches that there is no break in the history of salvation. We Gentile believers can never claim exclusive possession of the Gospel. We are always incomplete without our messianic brothers and sisters.

In Luke there is a strong emphasis on **witnesses** and **witnessing**. The noun "witnesses" occurs 13 times in Acts. So in Luke's model of mission "witness" is a very significant word. 'Witness' and 'apostle' are synonyms – i.e. "sent ones". It was Jesus who chose these witnesses. (Isaiah 43:10) When Peter was speaking about the death of Jesus at Cornelius' house He said, ***"God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen. He wasn't seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead***". (Acts 10:40-41)

These 'witnesses' were later expanded to include Paul (22:15) and Stephen (22:20) as well as others.

So what was the nature of this 'witness'? It was a witness to the Gospel – primarily to the Resurrection of Jesus and its significance. It was also a witness to the entire life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 13:31) Jesus proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom of God and this is what we must do as witnesses. The Good News of the reign of God is Jesus Christ, incarnated, crucified and risen and all that this accomplishes.

Witness is a good word to describe us:

- We are not called to accomplish anything!
- We are to point to what God has done and is doing.
- We give witness to what we have experienced.

What is our expectation of a response?

Witnesses proclaim repentance, forgiveness of sins and salvation. They aim at repentance (Acts 2:38) and faith. In Acts 26:17 Paul refers to what Jesus told him on the Damascus Road, ***"I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God so they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place amongst those who are sanctified by faith in Me".***

Salvation is in the name of Jesus only. Salvation is liberation from all bondage as well as new life in Christ. So we witness to people knowing that life and death depend upon our testimony. However much we appreciate other religions we must insist on repentance on the basis of what Jesus has done for us on the Cross.

We must do this urgently knowing the plight of people outside Christ. We must plead with people to turn from darkness to light. Everything is at stake! We are not indifferent to the future of those without Christ.

But to Luke, just personal faith in Christ is not the goal of mission. The goal is that the new believer moves into **a community of believers**. This involves a real and sometimes radical change in lifestyle carrying with it great moral responsibilities.

Luke's emphasis is on a new relationship with the poor. He outlines 6 dimensions of salvation: economic, social, political, physical, psychological and spiritual!

There must be a new relationship between the rich and the poor. In other words, salvation brings economic justice. In Luke 4:16-30 we see Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah at the beginning of His public ministry, ***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour"***.

Jesus championed "God's preferential option for the poor". He announced **Jubilee** which inaugurated a reversal of the dismal fate of the dispossessed, the oppressed and the sick. How was this to be done? It was by doing a radically new thing in the hearts of the rich and healthy to share with those who are victims of exploitation and tragedy.

It isn't enough to have a correct attitude to wealth! Wealth, power and prestige are the driving forces for success. There is an insatiable urge to move up socially and economically. The drive for a hedonistic lifestyle – totally devoid of an ethic – that exalts in self-sacrifice, restraint and solidarity with the poor pervades all cultures. With such self-centredness reigning supreme, we can't claim any continuity with Luke's portrayal of Jesus!

In Acts, as in Luke, there is an emphasis on compassion for the poor and marginalised in society.

- The Greek churches helped the saints in Jerusalem.
- The Jerusalem church shared everything they had so there was no-one needy among them.

Economic justice means that rich Christians should show solidarity with poor believers. The Gospel can't be Good News if we witnesses are incapable of discerning the real issues and concerns that matter to the marginalised. In Jesus' ministry we see that:

- those who are in pain are liberated
- the poor are cared for
- the outcasts and rejected are brought home
- all sinners are offered forgiveness and salvation

Preaching the Good News of peace by Jesus Christ is a vital part of Luke's Model of Mission.

"Then Peter began to speak, 'I now realise how true it is that God doesn't show favouritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the People of Israel telling the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all'." (Acts 10:35-36)

This includes:

- non-violent resistance in the face of evil
- emphasising the futility and self-destructive nature of hatred and vengeance
- acknowledging peace-making as an intrinsic aspect of our missionary message

We live in a world of increasing violence and increasing volatility. Terrorism, violence, crime, war and poverty are commonplace. They have become the norm of society. Peace-making permeates both Luke and Acts. The culmination is the account of Jesus praying for those crucifying Him in Luke 23 and the prayer of the dying Stephen in Acts 7:60.

In Luke's model there is no church, only disciples – followers. This is not so in Acts. Notice several key features:

- **The mutual acceptance of Jew and Gentile** – no homogeneous church growth principle
  - ✓ The story of Cornelius demonstrates that receiving Gentiles into faith meant entering their homes and accepting hospitality from them. 'Table fellowship' was vital!
  - ✓ This is a huge issue we are facing around the world.
- **A strong emphasis on prayer and fellowship**

  "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

  - ✓ The prayer life of Jesus that was such a prominent feature in Luke's Gospel is extended into the life of the church.
  - ✓ Notice the 4 Ps: **praise** – **prayer** – **preaching** – **partying**.
  - ✓ All this is accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **An outward orientation to serve**
- **The local churches were not institutionally united together into one structure**. The picture we see is more an association of believers large or small. The term "*ecclesia*" in Acts refers to individual associations of believers not to the universal church.
- **The pastors of these local congregations are made overseers of their flocks by the Holy Spirit,**

  "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the Church of God which He bought with His own blood." (Acts 20:28)
- **New believers didn't see themselves as 'church members' but as 'disciples of Jesus' or 'believers'.**

This is an "unstructured" picture of the church. What was the glue that kept them together? Firstly it was founded on the teachings of the apostles. The core values were based on this apostolic teaching. Their vision came from the apostolic missionary vision of Paul.

It is clear that the apostles made mistakes and were sometimes short-sighted, but mission took place in spite of them rather than because of them. God often overruled them if they went outside His will in making major decisions. This is vital to our understanding of this model.

Adversity and suffering are integral parts of mission. This was true in the mission of Jesus as He went from Galilee to Jerusalem and in His final journey of suffering and death. On the road to Emmaus Jesus said to His companions. ***"How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?"*** (Lk. 24:25-26)

What is true of the master is also true of the disciples. Here are a few examples from church history:

- We must take up our cross **daily.**

  "Then He said to them, if anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross <u>daily</u> and follow Me." (Lk. 9:23)

  "Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple." (Lk. 14:27)
- In Acts there are many stories of suffering. In Acts 4:27-30 we read of the arrest of Peter and John and their questioning. What is the product of their ordeal? Boldness! In Acts adversity always produces boldness.
- It seems that wherever Paul goes to proclaim the Gospel there are problems. He lived under the shadow of death.
- All the early Christian leaders except John suffered an early death.
- Paul and Barnabas told the believers in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ***"We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God."*** (Acts 14:22)
- Since Francis Xavier, early Catholic missionaries sent out from their communities were always given a cross – not as an ornament but as a handbook on how to carry out the mission.

So what is mission?

There is no simple definition. It is a multi-faceted service. It includes witness (proclamation) – service – justice – healing – reconciliation – liberation – peace – evangelism – fellowship – church-planting – contextualisation and much more. We must never get into "reductionism".

In essence, mission is to incarnate "the mission of God" in the world.