

Mission Acts 17:22-28

Over the weeks between now and Christmas, our evening services are going to look first at Mission and some examples through the years of how people have shared their faith, then at miracles and the people who are credited with doing the miraculous.

Mission is defined as the vocation or calling of a religious organisation to go out into the world and spread its faith. Those of you who have been following the All Saints series about Jonah will have heard something about this last week we learnt about Jonah's one man mission to a large, unpleasant city and Lynda explained that Christians are called to share God's message, by living it out as well as being willing to speak it.

As a child I was fascinated by stories of missionaries, reading about people like Hudson Taylor, Gladys Aylward and David Livingstone – amazing men and women who travelled to distant countries to bring news of a God who had sent His son to die and forgive their sins to people who spoke different languages and lived very different lives. I didn't really understand then that mission was something that could happen here and now in England. As I got older, I became involved in Missions, with a capital M – special times at sixth form or university always led by an expert from outside who would support students as they told those around them the good news of God's love. It still felt like an activity that needed leading by a specialist, not something that anyone could do.

It's only much, much, more recently that I have realised that this sharing of what they believe is part of what everyone who is a Christian is called to do, and of course it makes perfect sense. When we have something exciting or good in our lives we naturally share it with our friends and family, whether we have found just the right plant for a spot in the garden or gained a family member. It's not something that needs an expert or special training, it's as easy as having a chat with your neighbour! Paul in our reading from Acts simply picks up on the things he sees around him in Athens as the starting point for what he says. But it's not just about being able to talk, Christians need to live their life so that people see a difference, consistent honesty, kindness, not using bad language are all the kind of things that will help people to see there is something different about a Christian and may provoke a conversation.

In 2018 at All Saints we held a year of Discipleship when we thought about how Christians can follow Jesus by walking with him, working with him and watching how he does things (Matthew 11:29). But of course we can learn from others too, Paul spotting that the people of Athens believed in a god that they didn't know, those missionaries that I read about as a child are all examples of how to talk about God and share faith in Him. I am looking forward to hearing more about how people through the centuries have walked with Jesus, worked with Him and to watching how they did things so we can learn from them.