

A mother and her small son were walking along a beach after a storm. The unusually high tide had left the beach littered with starfish that had no way of getting back to the water they needed to survive. When he saw them, the little boy ran to the closest one and picking it up, tossing as far as his little arm would allow back into the waves. He then ran on to the next one and the next and the next. His mother called to him to stop. "You can't possibly save them all," she said. "You are too small and there are too many. You won't make a difference". He just stood and looked at her, a starfish clutched in his little hand.

When I think of mission and how I might be a part of it, I feel a bit like how that mother saw her son – too small and there are too many, too much, too far. What difference could I possibly hope to make? I feel overwhelmed by what might be expected of me, by whether I have the skills, the wisdom, the strength, the energy. To be honest, I don't even know what mission means!! Maybe some of you are faced with the same fears, feelings of inadequacy or just plain 'I don't know what to do' as I am?

Alison's talk last week answered one question for me. The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ, which can be demonstrated with the 'Five Marks of Mission.

- To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

So now, in the broadest of terms, I know what the Church regards as mission and that gives me some idea of what I can do.

But some of these seem enormous tasks, like the beach just strewn with starfish. And I still feel so very little. I am not Desmond Tutu, who could use his office and the voice of his office to pursue peace and reconciliation. I am not Billy Graham or Nicky Gumble, who can reach thousands of people to proclaim the good news. I don't feel brave enough or clever enough for any of this. It feels kind of hopeless.

Over the last few years, as I have come to know God, and know His word more and more, as I have listened to others and opened my heart, I have come to realise that God provides everything we need to do what he calls us to do. Firstly, in **Isaiah 41:10** we read: *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous hand.* So we are never alone as we set out to do the mission of Jesus. Again in **Acts 1:8** we read: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.* We told here that God will give us the strength and power we need. And in **1 Peter 4:10** the apostle Peter reminds us that God has given us each gifts and he encourages us to use those gifts to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. God has even given us a role model in Christ himself, so by looking at how he lived and behaved, we have a template for our own lives. And how do I get all these wondrous and amazing things? Simply I love the Lord my god with all my heart and all my soul and give my life to him and all these will be mine.

But I am still not Desmond Tutu, or Nicky Gumble or even Mother Teresa. I am still just one little person, like that little boy on the beach, the starfish clutched in his hand, looking up at his mum. "Mum," he said, "Mum I know I can't save them all, but for every starfish that I can throw back, I make the world of difference to that starfish."

So if you hear the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Remember all of this and put your hand up and say, "Here I am, send me."