

A VISION FOR EVANGELISM

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What is the point of evangelism? We think the answer is obvious. We want more people to know the love of God in Christ – and of course this is part of the answer. Or we may be concerned about the health of the church, declining numbers, and want to see churches growing once more. Again – this is in the mix.

But there is also a bigger story behind these two. Evangelism has its focus on the ultimate drama, the Good News of what God has done and is doing in Christ. Evangelism invites people to find their place within that story.

The story of God in Christ begins before we can imagine. But perhaps we best start with Creation, which reminds us that the whole of the natural world is significant within God's purposes.

The story then moves through humanity's disconnect with God, what we call 'the Fall', continues in God's relationship with the people and place of Israel, finds focus in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and ultimately heads to fulfilment when all is brought to completeness in Christ.

We find our part in the story 2,000 years after Christ and at some point (we have no idea how long) before the end of the story. It is a story of partnership between God and all creation, with humanity given a particular responsibility.

Inviting people into a life of faith (evangelism) is both an invitation to a profound life-giving relationship with God, and also an invitation to work with God for the making of a better world.

This means that the goal of evangelism is never one individual commitment, but the bigger story, the whole work of God. We invite people into the story both for their sake as individuals and because God needs more disciples who are committed to bringing positive change, playing their part in the bigger drama.



Seeing evangelism this way changes our perspective. It reminds us that our aim is not to grow the church but to grow the kingdom, to change the world in partnership with God. We bring perspectives from the Bible, particularly focussed on Jesus' life and teaching, that change how we see the world around us. We learn to see with God's eyes, and live life differently as a result.

We work with God for the wellbeing of all creation, for the thriving of our local communities, for those suffering under injustices. We are able to do this because our hope is in something bigger than what is immediately in front of us, and we are supported in prayer.

We are a movement for positive change, with church life not as the end goal but as the place where we are resourced, where we reconnect with the story, with God, and with others who share our commitments.

This story of what God is doing is incredibly positive, the heart of the Good News we share. We express it against the background of less positive stories about the meaning of life within our society. All of us have taken onboard some of these to an extent because they are all around us.

They tell us that our value is dependent on how we look, what we earn, what we spend our money on; that some people are worth more than other people; that the natural world is unimportant except in so far as it serves human needs.

Evangelism invites people to untangle themselves from these negative stories, to become free in Christ as they move into participating in something bigger than themselves, more positive, more life-giving. This is a significant part of the Good News we share.

Despite this broad vision, evangelism is humble, acknowledging that although we claim the significance of Christianity for the wellbeing of people and planet, that doesn't give us a monopoly on wisdom for the task. Others are journeying with us who hold different faith and worldview commitments, and we need to learn from them too.

We can and should share with confidence what we know of God, but we do so in humility, open to learn as well as to share, and expecting that both participants in the conversation will grow through the encounter.

Seeing evangelism this way is to take seriously our conversations with people as we encourage them towards a life of faith, but to do so aware of the bigger picture, the whole story of God in Christ that we are inviting them to join.

Our evangelism takes individuals seriously but doesn't stop there. Neither does it stop with the church. It has a wider vision and significance.



Keeping this big picture of evangelism in mind gives a framework for all God's people to find their place within the whole work of God, whether evangelistically or more drawn to the practical work of the kingdom.

For many, the practical work is where we start, with evangelism finding its place as we speak about what inspires us to do what we do, or how we stay hopeful when hope is hard to come by, or how we are sustained and are able to keep going when faced with people's struggles or the threats to creation.

For others, the words and conversation come easily so this is where we start, against the background of the broader vision which we live out personally as far as we can.

Either way, words and action work in partnership towards the overall vision, rooted in God's purpose for the thriving of all God has made, both human and the wider creation.

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