

One Mission bible study

Called to serve



The Methodist Church has a rich history – and no part more so than that surrounding the beginnings of the missionary endeavour. Wesley saw the whole world as his parish. But it took his friend the Revd Thomas Coke to take this renewed message of God's grace for all to other nations.

The first Methodist class meeting and preaching place outside Britain were established in the colony of Antigua by the planter and lawyer Nathaniel Gilbert, who was converted by John Wesley whilst at home in England. On returning to the island, Gilbert began holding meetings in his home in 1760, preaching to his 300 plantation workers from the steps of his house. After his death, leadership of the society was eventually assumed by the black and mulatto members: Sophia Campbell, Mary Alley and Bessie.

The hallmark of these early years was the way God's Spirit used lay people in a spontaneous way. Methodism reached America in the mid 1760s, and in 1769 the Leeds Conference appointed the first two preachers to be sent overseas: Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor.

Thomas Coke was an Anglican clergyman from Brecon who had come under the influence of the Methodists. After experiencing a profound spiritual change, Coke was dismissed from his curacy at

South Petherton, Somerset, on account of his Methodist tendencies. He became one of John Wesley's preachers. Accounts suggest that when Coke met Wesley, he asked for advice as to what he should do next. Wesley was supposed to have said, "Brother, go out, go out, and preach the Gospel to all the world". Whatever Wesley meant, we do not know. But Coke took the words to heart and took the principal role in developing Methodism's foreign mission.

The year 1786 marks the birth of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, some 30 years before it was formally constituted. Coke set sail for America with William Warrener, John Clarke and William Hammett. Instead of reaching Nova Scotia, they landed in Antigua on Christmas Day 1786. John Baxter, about to conduct Christmas services, could not believe his eyes. Nor could Coke, when he faced an almost entirely black congregation of 2,000 (slaves, for the most part) gathered in worship.

Wesley and Coke were both 'driven men'. The Methodist movement grew just as rapidly around the world as it did in Britain. Coke's first scheme was "a Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions among the Heathen" (which later became known as 'foreign missions', then 'overseas missions' and today World Mission).

The creative tension between ministry and mission at home and overseas has been at the heart of the growth of the world Methodist family from the beginning...



Two centuries after the first district gathering in Leeds to raise funds to support Coke's 'mission to the heathen', we celebrate the countless thousands of men and women, lay and ordained, who have responded to the call of God to cross oceans, languages and cultural boundaries, leaving home, family and friends behind – often at great sacrifice.

What was the driving force that persuaded such people to willingly take themselves (and often their families) to situations where they may only live for months – or at most a few years – before dying of disease? It was a deep desire to share the gospel of Christ with all the nations of the world.

Today, we still need people to respond to God's call to serve – both locally as well as overseas.



We do not know if there was an appeal to a particular passage in the Bible for there are so many which have at the heart this urgency to share God's grace for all. Read together the following four well-known passages and discuss which one speaks to you most clearly of our need to be engaged in God's mission today, locally and globally.

Isaiah 6:1-10

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I; send me!"*

Where is Isaiah? In a heavenly vision; a dream; in the midst of worship? Faced with the grandeur of God, he feels worthless. But God assures him of a new beginning; his guilt and sin have been taken away.

God challenges him to a particular task in going among the people with his word.

Matthew 28:16-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

What a command; a message the early Christians must have continually remembered – and taken strength from – that Christ would be with them in each and every situation. From very early on, preaching and teaching became entwined in our understanding of mission, and the Methodist Church sent teachers to set up schools and educate the local people.

Luke 4:16-20

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to let the oppressed go free...

What is often seen as the 'manifesto' of Jesus, taken from Isaiah 61, has encouraged those engaged in mission to see God's call not only to transform the lives of individuals, but also that of communities and nations. Over the years since Coke, the Church has been at the forefront of seeking justice and freedom for all – though perhaps not always as quickly as we wish they had!

Romans 10:5-17

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?

What relevance does this have today? Surely verse 10 of this passage is as true now as when Paul first

wrote it. We still need people to respond to the call of God; to live and work as Christians in mission, both here and across the world. Mission today is about partnership. We in Britain are receiving people from all over the world who are renewing our church life and challenging us to hear and see the gospel in new and relevant ways.

Mission is one; it is local and global. So God's call is to each one of us.

Response

- Which of the four passages speaks most to you about God's call to serve?

- How do we understand vocation/calling today?
- Write a short statement of no more than 50 words about your understanding of mission today.
- Collect them all up from the group and put in an envelope which will be opened and shared in Week 5
- What opportunities are there to serve locally and globally?

With service comes sacrifice

The early missionaries who arrived in Sri Lanka over 200 years ago showed us that with service comes sacrifice. This has proved to be the case too for Mervyn and Claudette Kilpatrick who left Glengormley, Ireland, for Sri Lanka.

The Kilpatricks have spent the last three years serving as mission partners at Mount Lavinia Methodist Church, just south of Colombo. Mervyn has been stationed as minister while Claudette has been serving as a pastoral, youth and children's worker in Mount Lavinia – the only English-speaking church in the circuit.

The Methodist Church in Sri Lanka celebrated its bicentenary last year; a momentous occasion which marked a new era for the island's rapidly expanding Christian population.

"It was a privilege to see a church that is growing," says Mervyn. "Its numbers are increasing and Methodism is spreading across the island."

"With the bicentenary, new churches are being planted, but under some opposition," adds Claudette. The Kilpatricks say that the ministry was really rewarding, especially as they witnessed its growth from infancy. There was a distinct absence

of a youth fellowship when the Kilpatricks arrived and they played a pivotal role in helping to shape it. The Kilpatricks explain that the entire ministry has been built up from virtually nothing and by the time they left, the young people were getting involved in evangelistic crusades out on the streets.

Like the missionaries who arrived over 200 years ago, the Kilpatricks have been working hard to spread the word of God. "William Ault arrived in Sri Lanka and he spent only six months in the country, but he did so much, even though he lost his wife en route. He established eight mission schools including the Methodist Central College."

"Mervyn and I always say 'with service comes sacrifice' - we had sacrificed to some extent, but not as much as those early missionaries who had that vision to go and do what God had called them to do faithfully. We've fulfilled what God wanted us to do in Sri Lanka. When we saw the needs of our family and the church in Ireland we felt it was the right time to come home," says Claudette.

Mervyn and Claudette say they are excited at the plans which God has in store for them now that they have returned home to take up an Irish Methodist circuit appointment in Longford. The three years

in Sri Lanka have been fruitful, prosperous and spiritually fulfilling for the Kilpatricks, and they have returned home with enthusiasm, ready to open the door on the next chapter of their Christian service.

“We feel God has called us there now,” says Claudette, “and it’s exciting to see what he has planned for us. Yes, it’s all good!”

Methodist ministers from across Sri Lanka gather for their retreat. Some of the fruit of 200 years of Methodist work in the country.

