

## Jesus' four "streams" of Communicating the Kingdom of God

The Gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus bring together how he "the Word" communicated the truths of God. We are used to thinking that truth is communicated verbally and in propositional statements. However, that was by no means the only channel or stream of truth that the New Testament shows us Jesus using in his ministry. The four Gospel accounts together, portray the width of the ministry of Jesus: a ministry of the kingdom of God/heaven. Matthew highlights three constant strands in his repeated summary verses 4.23 and 9.35 telling that Jesus:

- announced a call to a new direction (repent) as he proclaimed a re-interpreted worldview (kingdom);
- taught a transforming lifestyle (largely with parables of the kingdom);
- responded to need with compassion and the power of the kingdom;

The synoptic Gospels - Matthew, Mark and Luke - (Matthew 9.37-10.1 and Mark 3.13-15 and Matthew 28.19-20) also emphasise the fourth strand as Jesus:

- modelled this kingdom ministry and lifestyle in a multiplying community.

Jesus was the Good News. He announced good news, explained good news, demonstrated good news and lived good news in a small community.

It is particularly important for our understanding of mission and pioneering, to grasp this breadth of the kingdom communication.

Now building on our analysis above of the gospel writers accounts, we could summarise that Jesus' four channels of communicating truth involved:

- Proclamation - 'the kingdom is near, the time is right'
- Illustration - 'to what shall I liken the kingdom'
- Demonstration - encounter of divine love and power
- Incorporation - building a body of disciples

Jesus' four-fold ministry	
Of the Kingdom:	
• Proclamation	- announced
• Illustration	- taught the principles ...stories
• Demonstration	- responded to need with compassion and power
• Incorporation	- Modelled these three in a multiplying community

### Relating these insights to the culture and context of today's society

Especially in today's Western culture we recognise that post-Modernism has devalued absolute truth and brought about a shift to relative and personalised truth... your truth and my truth. More recently this has gone further to a society that speaks of "post truth and "fake news". How do we communicate the truth of Good News in this context?

Now it is helpful to relate this shift in receptivity to truth to these four channels of communication as it does not affect each in the same way. In fact this suspicion and even avoidance of any absolute truth largely hinders the communication of truth through the channel of **proclamation**. The presentation of gospel principles and an argued case for

the claims of Jesus are often the hardest to connect with people and them to embrace. However, it can be the case that our inherited church communication assumptions major on these types of proclamation.

By contrast however, the other three channels that Jesus used to communicate Kingdom truth are all still particularly effective in our society. We are in a story-telling culture that is open to narratives and personal experience that gives an *illustration* of truth.

Furthermore, our culture is seeking spiritual experience in many directions. Our society is very open to spirituality. Many or most will welcome an offer of prayer if sensitively made in response to genuine listening. There is rise in interest in retreats and people are moved by the experience of divine healing and the encounter with the presence of God. So the *demonstration* of the reality and power of an imminent God who acts by his Spirit can communicate powerfully in many ways.

Last but not least, our society is hungry for community and genuine relationship. Unconditional love is in short supply and folk are drawn to a community that models this in the face of breakdown of extended family and now nuclear family. *Incorporation* into an accessible expression of the body of Christ has great missional impact today.

And as we recognise how these three channels of truth communication have particularly powerful currency today, there is another important observation for us. Although proclamation truth has been strong in inherited church and often weaker in the other three channels, in fresh expressions of church it tends to be the reverse. They tend not to major on the expert authority proclaiming truth from the front, but rather explore it together in shared experience and story. Also, they are strong in creating spaces to develop spirituality encounter, excavating the tradition in symbol and sacrament, and in incorporation of new people in community earthed in current cultures and milieus (so often around eating together, as Jesus did).

And maybe we should not be surprised at this conclusion. Fresh expressions, as a movement of contextual church initiated by God's Spirit of mission, should be expected to create expressions of Jesus that first engage the culture before transforming it.

As a post-script to this analysis, we would suggest that as fresh expressions of church engage contemporary culture through story, kingdom works and spiritual encounter, all

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• Incorporation	- )	open	) of Church

Fresh expressions reimagine proclamation truth				
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embodied in holistic community, they are re-imagining the fourth truth stream - proclamation. This is illustrated in our last slide.

Through building relationships through loving and serving, fresh expressions are able to listen and discern where there are gospel connections and to respond to the questions that community, encounter and story provoke in those being drawn into a shared journey.