

2010

Theme: Pragmatic Evangelism – Acts 2:41 – 47

Our approach to this theme will be first to define the two words which are our focus at this Synod. The first is Pragmatic.

The word pragmatic according to the Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, is concerned with practical results and values; treating things in a matter-of-facts or practical ways. Pragmatism which is its noun is a philosophy, i.e. belief or theory that the truth or value of a conception or assertion depends upon its practical bearing upon human interests.

The second word is Evangelism: The root meaning of Evangelism is traced to "Evangel". The work 'Evangel' originally means 'The message of Redemption through Jesus Christ'. It also means any good news or glad tidings. The word is essentially of a Christian conception. Gradually the word 'Evangelism' evolved with the meaning – The zealous to preaching or spreading of the gospel.

Evangelism is traced to the source of the universe. The activity of God in the creation of the world and the preservation of the world shows God as the source of Evangelism. At creation God created the world and all that were in the world for the good of humanity. God created humanity and made the first man and woman the crown of creation. At the beginning of creation, we discover the place of humanity in creation. Every other thing that were created existed for humanity's welfare. In Genesis 1:27-30 we have this record

“So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every plant for food.”

This quotation reveals to us that humanity is the focus of creation. Evangelism is God-man relationship. The purpose for which humanity is created is that God may continue to be seen in operation in the world through humanity. The Pentateuch, the writings and

the Prophets show that the concern of God is the redemption of humanity. It is to the intent that humanity may have life in abundance. It is clear that the generosity of God which came to climax in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world has been evident at the beginning of creation. Thus the good news started from God at creation. It is the news of God's sacrificial, unconditional and eternal love for the world and particularly for humanity.

The whole activity of God in creation has an evangelistic motive. As such Evangelism is discovered in every person of the Trinity. That is, God the Father shows His love to the world through His sending activity to humanity and by his perpetual working in creation. God the Son is the expression of God's sending activity to humanity. In Him the perfect Sonship with the Father is made available to all humanity. The barriers are broken down and the reconciliation of all things is achieved. God the Holy Spirit is seen as the builder of the church and the edifier of the faithful. The evangelistic activity of the early Church began with Pentecost when Peter preached to the crowd in Jerusalem and about three thousand souls were added to the first congregation of the faithful. Evangelism is thereby to be viewed in the activity of God, ratified in the sending of His Son and activated through the Holy Spirit.

Evangelism is further discovered in God's love for the world. John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life". This love is described in the words of John thus "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us" John 1:14. God became man and dwelt with us. This is the implication of the quotation in John. The love of God as discovered in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ reveals to us what evangelism is. This love according to Paul was manifested for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Thus evangelism is out to show the people of the world about God's concern and love for the lost world. Evangelism is in essence loving the lost world. It is geared towards making people return to their source Being. It is therefore evident from the above that evangelism is making known by word and deed the love of the crucified and risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that people will repent, believe and receive Christ as their Saviour and obediently serve Him as their Lord in the fellowship of His Church (John20:21; Luke 4:18). Hence, the primacy of evangelism derives not from a desire simply to increase Church members, but from God's unique provision of eternal life in Jesus Christ. According to John, the evangelist, the reason for writing the Epistle is for fellowship with the Father as stated below, He said;

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and

touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the father and was made manifest to us-that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete". (1 John 1:1-4).

Evangelism is proclaiming the good news of the love of God as discovered in His Son, Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is sharing the Lord Jesus Christ with the world.

Evangelism therefore is making disciples of all the people. It is making Jesus known to the world by the quality of lives the evangelist lives. It is proclaiming the love of God to the world in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The purpose of evangelism is to help people, all over the world, to discover themselves within the context of God's plan for the world. It is discovering of one's personality in the person of Jesus Christ. It is creating an awareness of the presence of God in the world as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. It is to the effect of making everyone see oneself in Christ.

All facets of Church's life is geared towards evangelism. The Church building, the church bell, the choir, the clergy, the congregation have the same goal and purpose that is, the salvation of their souls and sharing the good news of salvation to those outside the Church.

Pragmatic evangelism therefore could be giving another name "Mission". Mission is the total movement in bringing salvation to the lost ones. Mission is defined as looking for a lost world and bringing the lost world into the loving redemptive relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Evangelism as has been defined is spreading of the good news of our redemption within our culture. The purpose of our calling as disciples is to be able to win souls and do mission because mission is the heartbeat of God. Doing mission is to be concerned with total wellbeing of the people of God in our generation. Hence, mission embraces all aspects of life, namely; politics, health, education, commerce, economic, social and religion to mention a few.

Our major concern at this Synod is to examine the methods the first disciples of Jesus Christ and converts on the day of Pentecost and beyond used to spread the good news of our salvation.

Acts 2:41 – 47, says

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and have favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

We discover from this passage, that;

- (i) Those who accepted Peter's message and were baptized were about three thousand
- (ii) They devoted themselves to
 - (a) The apostles' teaching
 - (b) The fellowship
 - (c) The breaking of bread and
 - (d) Prayer.
- (iii) All the believers were together and had everything in common
- (iv) They made provisions for the needs of the poor among them by selling their possessions and goods
- (v) They meet together in the temple court everyday
- (vi) They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts
- (vii) They were praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people, and the result was
- (viii) The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

In chapter 4 of Acts of the Apostles verses 32 – 37

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostle gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. Thus, Joseph who was surnamed by the apostle

Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

We discovered that many people became Christians through this practice. In answer to the complain of the Grecian Jews, that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles chose seven deacons to assist in the distribution in Acts 6:1-6. The result is found in Acts 6:7 which reads; "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith".

The writer of the Epistle of James, chapter 1 verse 27 says, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world".

The above makes it clear that whatever we profess has no effect until we put it to practice. This is why the Epistle of James can be titled as 'Faith and Work'. The Epistle of James chapter 2:14-26 reads,

"What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead."

If we claim to have faith we will justify our faith with our works. Jesus Christ said in Matthew 5:13-16,

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house, Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Jesus Christ did not only say this for fun, He justified His claim by what He did. The testimony of Peter concerning Jesus in Acts 10:34-39 gives credence to this fact. It says:

Then Simon Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem...

The testimony of Simon Peter in this passage makes it clear to us that Jesus did not merely preach the good news; He accompanied it with good works. He provided meals for the people, he healed the sick. He taught them the way of righteousness, He raised the dead and was concerned about the wellbeing of the people of his generation.

Jesus Christ expects all his followers to do what he has done: In John 14:12, He said, ‘I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing, he will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.’”

The Pharisees and teachers of Jesus days were spiritually bankrupt. The two groups were directly responsible for the sad spiritual condition of that time (Matt.23:2-3). As the successors of the law-giver Moses, they were responsible for expounding the law so that people would walk in God’s ways and have genuine and vibrant relationship with the Lord (Deut.10:12-13) But their personal interpretation and application of the law became more important than God’s law. They did not practice what they preached. Jesus exposed who they were – image managers, posers, and hypocrites. These attitudes of the Pharisees and teachers of Jesus’ days have found their way back into the ministries of religious leaders of our days. We have to discover the realities of the present day challenge and face it headlong. We must develop spirituality to the extent

that we become first hand witness of the demonstration of God in Christ. It is then we can represent Jesus Christ to the world. No one gives what he or she does not have. The test of the effectiveness of following Jesus is not just in what we say but in how we live. Let us model by words and actions what it means to follow Jesus.

The evidence of our faith rests on what we produce. Christians are called to be witnesses of Christ ministry in our present age. Matthew said concerning Jesus thus, 'Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness ... (Matt.9:35).

The Church today must follow the three fold ministries of Jesus. That is

- (a) Teaching
- (b) Preaching and
- (c) Healing.

We can understand why the missionary came to our country in 1842 preaching the good news, establishing schools and building hospitals. This is what pragmatic evangelism is involved. Christians must be relevant to people of our own age and also be concerned with the wellbeing of our environment. Genesis chapter 2:15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." This is the first task of man. We are created for a purpose. We are created to continue the work of creation, because God cares.

By the same token, Jesus intends for His Church to be:

- (a) A worshipping Church
- (b) A loving Church
- (c) A caring Church
- (d) A sharing Church.

These are the principles that will make the church today, a living church and a vibrant church.

The Church of Nigeria prepared an agenda called 1-1-3. That is an Anglican member must bring in a convert and make that convert a born again Christian within 3-years. The commitment of all Anglican and dedication to task of pragmatic evangelism will make the agenda realizable. The Church today needs to go back to the blue print of the first generations of our environment and generation. We need to do this in the following areas of our challenges –

- (i) Education
- (ii) Employment
- (iii) Politics
- (iv) Health
- (v) Care for the Aged

(vi) Providing for the poor and needy e.t.c.

The Holistic Gospel

Pragmatic evangelism is all – encompassing activity. We cannot target the soul to the neglect of the body. We must target the total person. The saying goes that a hungry man is an angry man and I want to add that a hungry man will not likely be interested in our programmes for teaching or instruction. We all exist in a social environment and many times what happens around us shape the way we think or behave, whether for ill or for good. For example, the climate change early this year has affected our production of food and the time of harvest of some of our farm products. Where there are negative impacts on people's lives from their social situation, we must have the confidence as a Church to apply the gospel both theoretically and practically to that situation. Just like Jesus fed the five thousand, we must constantly find a way of feeding our own 'five thousand', so that our evangelism programme will not be hindered by problems in their lives and environments. We must make sure that they are able to listen to us and not deafened by their hunger or their ill health.

In Deuteronomy Chapter 15 verse 4 and verses 7 – 11 we read

“But there will be no poor among you (for the LORD will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance to possess),

“If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, what ever it may be. Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart, and you say, “The seventh year, the year of release is near,’ and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and it be sin in you. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land.”

Generally, we try and provide amenities and where and when possible, so that people are lifted from their level to a higher level of existence. We were rightly told that the then Church Missionary Society (CMS) introduced the cassava plant into our country when

they brought the gospel. The Church Missionary Society also introduced educational institutions which were called Mission Schools administered by Catechist and clergymen in those days. They also brought facilities for health care among our people. It is high time the present day Church revisited these programmes where they do not exist. These are integral parts of our pragmatic evangelism agenda. It is part of our mission mandate. A general statement on this is that “any need that when met, will lift the living standards of the people, we take the gospel to, must be part of our evangelism engagement. The Church must collaborate with the government, be it Federal, State or Local level to wage total war against poverty from our lands.

We must collaborate with the government in her bid to reduce the number of people affected or infected with HIV/AIDS. We must wage total war against malarial rollback. The church must establish schools from nursery to university level where virtues take precedence over academia. We need to give attention to teacher training programmes in our nation; in order to wage war against corruption and hypocrisy. We have to teach our children, the fear of the Lord in their formative years, when their hearts and minds are tender to receive instructions. Religious instructions and worship must take central part of our education curriculums. It is high time that the church collaborated with the government to establish well equipped Teaching Hospitals in Nigeria, in order to save our political leaders from going overseas for medical treatment or check up. Most of our highly qualified medical officers are now serving overseas because of better condition of services. We are blessed with good weather in Nigeria. The CMS introduced cassava plants to our system. It was then, the Bible and the plough. In our days at school we were taught this following hymn:

Ise agbe nise ile wa
Eni ko sise a ma jale
Iwe kiko, laisi oko ati ada
Koi pe o, koi pe o.

In our primary and modern schools, we were introduced to ‘Young Farmers Club.’ I appeal to the Government of the day to revisit farm settlement that was initiated by the late Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo. Let our government establish farm settlements in all local governments in our country. The Government should encourage mechanized farming by providing the machinery needed for the same. We should encourage our young ones to study agriculture in order for us to fulfill what God commanded the first man, Adam to do – Gen.2:15, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

Our government would be able to do two things for the nation through this venture:

- (a) Provide employment for the teeming youths who are unemployed (Job security)
- (b) Provide food for the populace – (Food security).

The church must also collaborate with the government of the day by encouraging God's fearing members of the Church to join politics. Some people said that politic is a dirty game, but I say politic is not a dirty game. It was when dirty people get to politics that they made it a dirty game. Every human being is a political animal. It is part of our pragmatic evangelism for Christian to enter every aspect of human endeavour to bring God to bear in all areas - Ps.24 verse 1 reads, "*The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*"

Hence, provisions and agenda must be put in place for all people of our world, children, youth, adult, aged, sick, needy and poor. It is then we are all engaging in the 'Pragmatic Evangelism'.

The church, above all, should provide for the domestic aspect of life, a vacuum created by our world of civilization and materialism. Attention needs to be given to parenting. Nursing mothers must not engage in any professional activities or vocation that will deny children of their cares and upbringing. The government should make a law that forbids any mother from engaging in other business at the time the family is rearing children. Our rotten society is a product of lack of adequate parenting for our children who grow up to be youth of today and adult of tomorrow. Our generation is witnessing what was not the case in the first half of the last century. Cases of kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, adultery, idolatry, examination malpractices, divorce, bribery, corruption and assassination are becoming part of our society. Our rich culture provides for the peaceful co-existence of the family and society. Children that are brought up in the fear of the Lord and for the praise of His holy name will bring back the past glory of this nation. 'Charity the adage says begins at home.' The book of Proverbs chapter 1 verse 7 says, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.' It is high time we gave attention to the total well being of humanity. This is pragmatic evangelism.

Let me conclude by saying that the church today will be able to do pragmatic evangelism only by being Christ-like in all its ramification. In our modern world that highly values outward beauty, we would be wise to remember that our greatest treasure is the life of Jesus within us. Jesus gave services and salvation to us sacrificially. He said,

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (Jn.10:10)

In the 1st letter of John chapter 3:16, we read

“This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers”

We must follow His footsteps if we are truly His disciples. We must let the world see the practical demonstration of our professions as followers of Christ. Paul the apostle knew this and he said in 2 Cor.5:17 thus, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come”. It means we must be a new creation inside out. Then we will grow in faith gracefully, beautifully and creatively. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, chapter 3:1-17 spells it out this way –

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you; immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away; anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all. Paul on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with

thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

The above shows that the gospel of Jesus Christ must affect every aspect of our daily lives including our marriage and families, our stewardship of the resources entrusted to us and our attitude towards those in authority and those who are in need.

I charge all of you to engage in pragmatic evangelism for through it the gospel shall be preached to the end of the world. We must not longer live our own lives; we must live the life of Jesus. We must be Christian in words and actions. We must follow Jesus Christ’s method to win the world for God’s kingdom. Let us go out from this Synod with the determination to transform our world view by our Christ-like virtues.

Your friend and Bishop,
+Olubayo Ilesa.