



transforming church
for all ages

Today ... not tomorrow

Matthew 28: 18-19

Sermon Outline

Today ... not tomorrow: Matthew 28: 18-19

“Let’s stop commenting on how it was, waiting for what might be in the days ahead and start living in the present – Encouraging Young Missionary Disciples.”

Along with Genesis 1: 1, Psalm 23 and John, 3:16, the final words of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew are probably some of the most well-known within the church. One question though is, how are they permeating the lives of our churches? - and not just for those with a ‘passion for evangelism’, but for all.

In his book *The church invisible* Nick Page writes, ‘We have to start with the children. If you want to change the future you have to start with those who are going to build the future.’ He doesn’t suggest they are the future, or the ‘church of tomorrow’, but rather that they are the ones who will build what will come. How as churches are we helping our children and young people to do just that?

Are we bold and daring enough to imagine a church where children, young people and adults are integral to the life of a healthy church? Where they are valued as individuals and disciples, loved and accepted and encouraged to develop their faith and gifts? Where they are disciplined to engage their faith in every area of their lives?

If we are, then the adventure starts now. It actually started a long time ago - Jesus’ actions, words and challenges being reminders to us all of the call God sets before us as his children. With children and young people leaving the church, and many of their peers having no idea who Jesus is and the difference knowing him can make, this is not something that can be put off till tomorrow, it’s time to do something, today.

The notes below are offered as suggestions to prompt your own thinking, rather than as a ready-made sermon structure.

Background

Some version of the passage can be found in all four gospels and the book of Acts. It is, in many ways, the culmination of Jesus’ earthly ministry. In Acts 1 we read of Jesus’ final words to his disciples and his ascension, but in Matthew 28 Jesus shares with the disciples the ‘Great Commission’, as it is often referred to. It is not the first time Jesus ‘sends out’ his disciples (see Matthew 10:-5-42). With this ‘sending out’ Jesus ups the ante though.

It is also important to note that this passage comes soon after Jesus has been raised back to life. Although this may seem an obvious observation to make, it is important to recognise that the disciples would no doubt have had questions, frustrations, fears and there would have been a sense of excitement, perhaps, as to what Jesus was going to do next – the continuation of his earthly ministry with them in tow. This was obviously not to be, at least in the way they envisaged it. The challenge before us is, how will we go into all the world, with the specific focus of enabling and releasing the children and young people of our churches to be all God calls them to be.



The sermon – questions and suggestions

- » There are four parts to Jesus' commission; to go, to make disciples, to baptise and to teach - to encourage missionary disciples.
- » Known as the 'Great Commission', to commission in this respect is to appoint a task (v18-19) to a group of individuals (the disciples, and thus us).
- » How is each part evidenced in the life of your church with regard to children and young people? If any part is not evident, what is the reason for that? Is it purposeful or simply by accident?
- » The passage comes at the end of three years of earthly ministry for Jesus. It was at this point that the disciples were truly commissioned. Have we become too familiar with the 'Great Commission' that we have lost the sense of awe, privilege and responsibility that it brings?
- » If taken on fully, Jesus' command should in turn result in new disciples who would then go, and so on. Is this something that is encouraged, thought through and envisioned in our churches?

What are some of the steps that will be required if the church is to be transformed for all ages?

- » Firstly, the church needs to take seriously Jesus' words in Matthew 28, to make disciples. Not in a pre-packaged way, counting the numbers, but genuinely grappling with what it means for us in our localities, our communities. The church needs to look afresh at the challenge before it and not get sucked into its agendas, ideas and plans, but rather look to see how everything flows out from God's purposes.
- » Secondly, the church needs to recognise that ministry amongst children and young people is not something for a select few to engage with, or to be passed off to those with school-aged children or young people of their own. There needs to be a genuine engagement from the whole of the church, considering the vast and varied ways of being involved in this area of the church's ministry. This is not elevating children and young people above others or saying everyone else has to fit around them, but rather working towards a model where children and young people are invited to, and able to speak into and challenge, the life of the whole church, not just the other way around (as is often the norm).
- » Thirdly, the church needs to seek God. Echoing the 'On our knees', days of prayer back in 2006 and 2007, the church needs to continue to bring the children and young people of our churches and our communities before God. A fresh and enduring aching for children and young people is needed within the church, a passion and a desire to see them discover Jesus and become his disciples. This can only come from God.



Questions for further thought and discussion

- » How have children and young people, and the ministry amongst them, been separated off (maybe with the best intentions) by the church, rather than wholly engaged with and embedded fully into the life of the church?
- » Is there a need to appropriately, yet publicly, own our actions and our failings regarding children and young people?
- » As a church there is the opportunity for us to say 'enough is enough', to 'turn a corner' and seek to make a difference in the lives of children and young people, and the part God calls them to play within our churches today. Are we really bothered to commit to that though - as a 'whole church', children, young people and adults?

Notes and illustrations

Tape or rope off an area of seats. Use this to illustrate the children and young people who are leaving the church, who have never heard about Jesus and are side-lined in many churches.

You might want to give out a piece of tape, rope or string as part of a response or as people leave.

Have a large hourglass or digital countdown in clear view of everyone as a reminder that we cannot afford to not act, with regard to engaging with children and young people within our churches and our communities.

Play the montage clip on www.youtube.com of '40 Inspirational Speeches in 2 minutes'.

Film (acquiring the appropriate permissions) or invite some children and young people to share their responses to the question 'what makes a good church'.

Play the 'Today...not tomorrow' film.

Invite people to share their responses, to the three questions the children answer in the film:

- » how would you describe the part you play in the church?
- » what excites you about the church and why?
- » what do you believe the role of the church is, in our world today?

Further Reading

The Church Invisible, Nick Page



Children's Session

Today... Not Tomorrow: Matthew 28: 18-19

"Let's stop commenting on how it was, waiting for what might be in the days ahead and start living in the present – Encouraging Young Missionary Disciples."

Introduction

These sessions are designed to complement the sermon outlines that are part of this resource. These sessions use the same passages to explore the same themes in a way that is relevant to children, and to enable to cross-over in terms of discussion between children and their parents.

Each session is divided up into eight sections: Welcome, Game, Quick Quiz, Bible Story, Thought, Activity, Prayer response and Finish. Apart from the activity, about five minutes should be allowed for each section. The activity is likely to take longer, nearer ten minutes.

The session outlines are not intended to be rigid programmes you must stick to. If there are regular elements to the times when you meet with the children in your group, include these, and do not be afraid to add in extra games or activities that you think would further enhance the session.

It is a good idea to plan ahead in order to ensure you have the resources needed for the session. If there is a rota of people who teach the children's groups at your church, it would be a good idea to get together ahead of the sessions so you can ensure as much continuity, and an overall sense of unified direction in terms of what you will be communicating.

Please note that these sessions are written to be used with children aged 5-11, however some elements may need to be adapted to suit younger children.

Welcome

Over the next six sessions, as the children gather each time, have a banner/poster for them to decorate together. The banner can either be made of one large sheet of paper or three or four sheets of A3 plain white paper stuck together. Write on it the words 'Today...not tomorrow - Transforming the church for all ages.' Provide colouring pens or pencils for the children to use, remembering that this does not have to be completed in one session, but is designed to take the six weeks.

As the children gather and start to colour, begin by asking how they are doing that day.

Once they've had a chance to share briefly, ask them the following two questions:

- » What colour would you use to describe the week you've just had?
- » What was one really exciting thing that happened this week?

Share with the children how, over the next few weeks when you meet, you will be looking at different topics that will help everyone think about the phrase on the banner and what it means.



Game

Explain to the children that you are now going to play the 'waiting game'. Everyone will count down from 5 to 1 and then be silent. The aim of the game is to not be the first person to speak. Try the game a few times depending on how quickly someone makes a sound. Depending on your group, you may want to set some rules at the start - for example, no poking or pulling funny faces. On the other hand you might want to encourage pulling funny faces as the game progresses.

Share with the children how, sometimes, waiting can be very boring (some of the children might have complained how the game was itself boring). Go on to explain how children like themselves can often be told that they have to wait until they can do things, especially in church; however, the bit of the bible you are going to look at reminds us how Jesus calls us all - children, youth and adults - right now.

Quick quiz

The following three questions are designed to help get the children thinking. You may simply want to ask them for their response, you could get them to write them on post-its and stick them up, maybe talk with the person next to them - or something else.

- 1 How would you describe the part you play in the church?
- 2 What excites you about the church and why?
- 3 What do you believe the role of the church is, in our world today?

Bible Story

Before the session, decide on three or four 'highlights' from Jesus' earthly ministry to share with the children. Ensure that you just give headlines and don't recount entire stories or accounts.

Having shared these with the children, describe the scene in Matthew 28 before reading the Matthew 28: 16-20.

Thought

The thoughts are split into three subsections; the 'Grab' serves as an introduction and something to 'grab' their attention. The 'What does it say?'; refers to the bible passage and brings out something of the teaching from the bible directly. The 'What should we do?' then applies the teaching to their lives, helping them think through what difference this should all make in their lives.

Grab

Show the clip from the film *A Bug's Life* where the ants, along with the circus bugs, build the bird to scare off the grasshoppers.

What does it say?

Explain to the children that the passage comes at the end of Jesus' time here on earth before he went back to heaven. It was one of the last things he said to his disciples, his friends, those who know him and are trying to live for him – thus that means us too, even today.

Jesus gives a command to go and tell others about him. He doesn't say go just to the old people though, or even just to the children, he tells them to go to everyone.



What should we do?

Remind the children of the clip from *A Bugs Life*. Ask them who helped build the bird? Ask them what were the different jobs that needed to be done to complete the building of the bird. Share with the children that the same is true of the church as we respond to the command of Jesus in Matthew 28. It is something everyone has a part to play in, in lots of different ways. Explain to the children that, as a whole church - children, youth and adults - you are all spending some time looking at this and how, together, you can all live as Jesus' disciples and friends in the world today.

Activity

To help the children think about how we are all called by Jesus to follow him and to tell others about him, however young or old we may be, explain to the children that they are going to use their feet. Taking the word 'go' from Matthew 28, the children will get a chance to respond creatively with their feet.

You will obviously be aware of any children in your group who may physically not be able to walk and therefore, if this is the case, you will need to be wise about the words you use to introduce this activity if you choose to use it at all.

Each child will need a sheet of thick A4 paper or card (black will work best, but any colour will do). Depending on your facilities and resources the children can either print their feet using paint onto the piece of thick card or paper, or draw round their feet and then cover the footprint with PVA glue. They then need to pour salt over it so it is completely covered. Carefully pouring off the excess salt, they will be left with their footprints in salt.

Emphasise to the children that we are called to go, to be salt and light in the world, and to tell others about Jesus.

Prayer

As you draw the session to a close, ask the children if there is anything they would like to talk to Jesus about, to pray about. It could be about something from the session today or something else. Make sure the children are given a chance to share and do not belittle any of their requests, however trivial we might think them to be.

Having given them all a chance to share, explain how you will now have a time talking to Jesus and any of them who would like to talk out loud can do so, although they can also talk to him quietly in their heads. You might like to pass a bible round at this point so the child holding the bible prays, although ensure they know that they can pass it on without saying anything. It is a good idea to start and end the time of prayer by praying yourself.

Finish

As the children go, leave them with the challenge:

- » How will they help to see the church transformed for all ages?



Youth Session

Today... Not Tomorrow

Introduction

These sessions are designed to complement the sermon outlines that are part of this resource. Because youth groups may meet during the week and may also hear the sermons, these sessions use different passages to explore the same themes in a way that is more relevant to young people.

Each session is divided into four sections: Welcome, Worship, Word, and Witness. This approach has been used to provide a simple structure which lends itself to involving young people in leading. With support, young people (especially older ones) can be encouraged to lead a section of the session; or the whole session could even be shared out amongst them. For this to happen it is worth planning ahead to think who can be asked and how they can be best supported to do their bit. It may be appropriate to meet with them in advance, or communicate in some way about what is required.

Another reason to plan ahead is in order to ensure you have the resources needed for the session. For example, this first session requires one or more Chinese Sky Lanterns and the [Today ... not tomorrow film](#). You will also need a way to play video clips from the internet.

At the end of the session are a number of additional resources. There is a song suggestion (with YouTube link) and an optional movie clip for each session should these be appropriate. There are also some suggestions for making the sessions more active – particularly for younger groups or those who just enjoy more physicality.

Welcome

Ask people to share any ambitions they have held – whether serious or not. This could be what they would like to do in the future. Have these changed, or been left behind, or fulfilled?

Worship

Read Jeremiah 29:11

Encourage people to close their eyes and to quietly think about their hopes and fears for the future.

Take the group outside and launch an (Eco Friendly) Chinese Sky Lantern. If budget allows you may want to get enough for a small one each. As it is/they are released it may be appropriate to use a form of words such as "Lord, I give my hopes and fears to you".

Read Jeremiah 29:11 again and invite prayers of thanks for the good plans God has for us.



Word

Read Acts 1:1-11

Ask:

- » Why do you think these words of Jesus are so important?

Draw out the idea that 'last words' are often significant and that Jesus here gives us a strong insight into what our priorities should be.

Ask:

- » What does it mean to be Jesus' witnesses?
- » Where are we to be witnesses?
- » Does being a witness mean that we should only witness to certain types of people who are like us (eg other young people) or is it bigger than that?
- » How can we be a witness to people from other cultures?
- » How about from other generations (children, old people and those inbetween)?

Ask:

- » Do you think the disciples liked having to wait?
- » Did Jesus act in the way they expected?
- » Can you share any experiences of having to wait for God?
- » Was/is that difficult?
- » Did God do what you expected him to?
- » What feelings go with this process?
- » How can we cope with this?
- » What role does the Holy Spirit play in all this?

Witness

Have two large pieces of paper. On one write the words 'Young people are the church of tomorrow', on the other write 'Young people are part of the church of today'. Encourage the young people to write on both sheets whether they agree or disagree, any thoughts they have, or any emotions the words raise.

Say: The future is important, but we need to be careful not to neglect the present. This series is seeking to help the whole church to think about the part children and young people can play – today. Play the *'Today...not tomorrow'* film.

Invite people to share their responses to the three questions the children answer in the film:

- how would you describe the part you play in the church?
- what excites you about the church and why?
- what do you believe the role of the church is, in our world today?

Spend some time in prayer, acknowledging any difficulties or hurts that have been raised, as well as any excitement or hopes for the future. Pray for the church as a whole as it explores the place of children and young people in the wider body. Also pray that the young people will be able to discover and play their part in the life and mission of the church.



Check with the young people if they are happy for the pieces of paper to be passed on to whoever is preparing the sermon for the second service in the *Today... not tomorrow* process where they will be referred to and possibly displayed. Remember to pass on the sheets of paper to the relevant person!

Other resources:

Song: For Your Glory by Ben Cantelon & Matt Redman: <http://youtu.be/8ej4MQLi5H4>

Movie Clip: *Back to the Future 2*: <http://youtu.be/d68yRIE9OvQ>. Marty McFly visits his home town, Hill Valley, in 2015. Use it to discuss expectations of the future, and how sometimes they may not match up to reality! This vision of the future is from 1989!

For younger (or more active) groups:

Welcome: Ask the young people to keep their ambition to themselves. They then have to act out whatever it is and the rest of the group can try and guess!

Word: Play a game of Stuck in the Mud (instructions can be found here: <http://www.playgroundfun.org.uk/GameRules.aspx?gameVersionID=29>). This can be used to draw attention to issues of waiting, patience and frustration!

