



WORKSHOPS – B2.1 TITLE : MISSIONARY DISCIPLES	SPEAKER : DR. MARK KWAKU NIMO
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Introduction

Thank you all for deciding to be at this workshop on “Missionary Disciples.”

During this presentation, it is my hope that we can explore three main questions and one challenge:

1. Who gave us this phrase, “missionary disciples?”
2. What does it mean to be “missionary disciples?”
3. A Challenge: To be “missionary disciples” is to embrace “missional Christianity”
4. How do “missionary disciples” look like or what are the marks of “missional Christianity?”

1. Who gave us this phrase, “missionary disciples?”

The short answer is Pope Francis. And this is where we find it. In His Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* (119, 120), the Pope writes:

“In all the baptized from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization...(120) In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt. 28:19) All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries,” but that we are always “missionary disciples.” If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully. “We have found the Messiah.” (John 1:41) The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans came to believe in him “because of the woman’s testimony” (John 4:39)...”



2. What does it mean to be “missionary disciples?”

The mandate to be “missionary disciples” was given by Jesus Christ, as Pope Francis refers to in Matthew 28:19. This scripture has often been referred to as the “Great co-mission.” Sadly, many scholars have observed that this mandate given by Jesus has rather become the “Great o-mission.” This is why Pope Francis reminds us to go back and claim this essential identity of our Christian faith.

Pope Francis’ predecessors, Blessed Pope Paul VI, St. Pope John Paul II, and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, have all on different occasions during their pontificate reminded us of this deep identity of every baptized person. Pope Paul the VI reminded us in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14 that;

“...evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church.” It is the task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is a memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.”

We will not grasp the depth of this mandate unless we come to an understanding that the word *mission* first and foremost applies to God. It is God who has a mission (referred to as *missio Dei* by missiologists as far back as the 1930’s) and *co-missions* the Church to this task. If you like, the Church does not have a *mission*, rather *mission* has the Church.

Is the mission to evangelize my deepest identity? Is this the reason for my existence? How committed am I to evangelize? Why have we lost this evangelistic identity?

I think the Catholic Charismatic Renewal reminds us that we need the fire of the Holy Spirit in order to retrieve this “lost identity” of many who are baptized. (Zechariah 4:6, 2 Timothy 1:6-7, Acts 1:8). For the **New Evangelization** to become a reality, we all need a **New Pentecost**. This is no human project but rather a task that is beyond our plans, projects and abilities.

St. Pope John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Missio*, 3 says:

“The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the church is constantly on the increase. When we consider the immense portions of humanity which is loved by the Father and for who He sent His Son, the urgency of preaching the Gospel is more obvious. I sense that the moment has come to commit all the energies of the Church to the New Evangelization and to the mission *Ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty to proclaim Christ to all peoples.”

To the Bishops of America and the Caribbean Islands, Pope Benedict XVI said in 2008: “By virtue of your Baptism, you are *missionary* and *disciple*.”

I am glad that all the Popes have spelt it out so clearly that this mission is for all the baptized and not just for the experts or professionals.



3. A Challenge: To be “missionary disciples” is to embrace “missional Christianity.”

There is no doubt that the words *mission* and *missionary* have been perceived in negative terms, especially in the post-colonial period and beyond. Anthony J. Gittins observes;

“If *mission* is understood as an incursion into other people’s lives, accompanied by force or fear, or the determination to change people against their will, then mission is worth all the bad press it receives (and a good deal more). If *missionaries* are understood to be insensitive, dogmatic, judgmental, and joyless people, then they deserve to be judged severely and to be considered as betraying rather than upholding the essential message of Christianity. But again if *missionary* describes those who go overseas in the name of the gospel or purports to describe what they do when they get there (which is often a very narrow understanding that would restrict missionary activity to Church-building or even proselytism), then it too is a word that should be expunged from the dictionary or at least carefully redefined.”

Gittins contends therefore, that “these matters have contributed to the recent coinage of the word *missional*, in an attempt to describe an authentic spirituality that has no necessary connection with working overseas and has absolutely nothing to do with force, fear, dogmatism, or joylessness.”

“*Missional* is an adjective; applied to Christianity or to individual Christians it describes a lifestyle that is specifically and intentionally exocentric rather than endocentric, boundary-breaking rather than boundary-maintaining,” concludes Gittins. It is to the essential marks of “missional Christianity” that I now turn to in conclusion.

4. How do “missionary disciples” look like or what are the marks of “missional Christianity?”

a. Missional Christianity or “missionary Disciples are Mystics

Karl Rahner, wrote in 1971: “The time is fast approaching in our world, when to be a Christian, one has to be a mystic or cease to be anything.” (Theological Investigations, 41). The mystic is one who has experienced God through an encounter at a deeper level of life beyond the superficial. How does mystical faith look like? Ronald Rolheiser, helps us to capture the essence of mystical faith. First, it is practice-based more than belief-based. It is characterized by extended time of personal prayer and study of God’s word. The mystic (Christian) is the one who has fallen in love with God and longs to spend time with God as expressed by the Psalmist in Psalm 63. Second, mystical faith longs and gathers regularly with others in community (*koinonia*) for ritual of table-fellowship. It is Eucharistic! It is a life lived in thanksgiving, gratefulness, joy and adoration. Third, mystical faith is counter-cultural. It proclaims Jesus as Lord! It is a life of radical discipleship. Faith has to transform every facet of the life of the Christian to the root (*radix*). Fourth, mystical faith is prophetic! The prophet does not only speak the word of the Lord but lives the word of God in such a way that it “disturbs the comfortable and comforts the afflicted.” (Dorothy Day). The prophet speaks what he hears from the Lord. The prophet Isaiah gives us a classic model: “The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to answer the weary a word that will waken them. Morning after morning he wakens my ear as disciples do.” (Isaiah 50:4)



b. Missional Christianity spreads the aroma of Christ

St. Paul wrote to the Church of Corinth exhorting them to spread the fragrance (aroma of Christ). (2 Corinthians 2:15) Are we willing to risk it all for Jesus like the woman in the gospel who broke her alabaster jar of costly perfume to anoint the feet of Jesus? (John 12:3) All of the baptized have received the anointing but sadly many of us are safely keeping and safeguarding the anointing in the “alabaster jar.” “The whole house was filled with the fragrance of the oil,” because the woman broke it. The Holy Spirit, which has been poured into our hearts, is the love of God (Romans 5:5). Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa says, the Holy Spirit makes us “smell right.” We cannot tame or try to domesticate God’s power that has been freely given to us. Be fearless apostles! In the words of Pope Francis to the young people at World Youth Day in Brazil, “go make a mess.” This is what it means to announce or proclaim the Good News we have received.

c. Missional Christianity fosters unity in the Body of Christ and Beyond

Dr. John Armstrong has coined the phrase *missional ecumenism* to describe efforts at fostering unity amongst Christians in response to Jesus’ great priestly prayer in John 17:20-21. Jesus prayed to the Father ***“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.”*** In order to give credible witness to the gospel, unity is essential. This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and for many Christians the “war” still rages on. In the Last Supper discourse of John’s gospel Jesus told His disciples ***“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** (John 13:34-35). Roman Catholics should love Lutherans, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Baptists, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Orthodox and beyond. Love the Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Atheist, the agnostic, as Jesus loved us. It cost Jesus everything to love each one of us. It cost Jesus his very life to love. He commands us to love because he has given us his love and demonstrated to us how to love one another. Missional Christianity challenges us to live this costly love. Pray together with our Christian brothers and sisters, read the scriptures together, share the gospel of Jesus Christ by genuine acts of love. Build friendships with other Christians and be willing to know them first as human beings who have hurts, fears, doubts, prejudices, hopes, dreams, aspirations and above all a desire to love God, in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Be willing to learn from Jesus and others. This is what it means to be a disciple (*mathêtes*-learner in Greek). To be missional is to get into the “mess” and “good” of humans just like God the Father did by sending (mission) Jesus His Son, in the power of His Holy Spirit. Embrace missional Christianity and be “missionary disciples.”



Further Reading

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Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*, San Francisco: Simon and Shuster, 1995.

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Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, New York: Image, 2014.

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Weddell, Sherry A. *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to knowing and following Jesus*, Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2012.