**Life on the Frontline**

**Week 1**

There is an unwritten hierarchy in many people’s thinking about the importance of the jobs which Christians might do.

I wonder if you secretly hold this view?

The most important Christians are missionaries – those people who leave home and head overseas to some distant and dangerous land to share the gospel.

Next come clergy – people who devote their lives to pastoring churches.

Then there’s the Christians who work in nursing or teaching, or who maybe volunteer in the community running foodbanks.

Finally, there’s everyone else, just getting on with stacking supermarket shelves or typing all day on a computer…

…Although maybe there’s also an underclass of people who work in the grubby world of business, selling second hand cars or trading shares.

But what if we’ve got it all wrong?

What if God sees all vocations (at least all moral and legal ones) as of equal importance – as opportunities to glorify him, build his kingdom and serve others?

Think about the country we live in for a moment.

Maybe a few decades ago, Christianity was the default religion of our land. It was said that in the 1930s the three most influential figures in Britain were the prime minister, the editor of the Times and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Not so anymore.

Whilst our society still retains many vestiges of its Christian past, we live in a secular, multicultural society which is increasingly side-lining, if not rejecting, the Christian worldview.

In just a few decades we have moved from a position of power to being a minority interest.

But, what do we believe about God?

Think for a moment about the creeds we recite each Sunday.

“I believe in God Almighty, creator of heaven and earth”

The whole world is the Lord’s – the bits that recognise it and the bits that don’t. He made everything and sustains everything day by day.

“I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, who was born of the virgin Mary…”

God has entered this world in his Son, out of love, in order to save the whole world.

“He will come again to judge the living and the dead”

There will be a day of reckoning when everyone will have to give an account for their lives.

“We look for the resurrection of the dead, the life of the world to come”.

This whole world will one day be rid of evil and remade according to God’s perfect purposes.

The point I’m trying to make is that the *whole* world matters to God. It’s his – all of it!

Jesus came to establish God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

And Jesus continues to build God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven *through* his people – the church – you and I!

So, if Jesus wants to transform all of the world for God, might it be the case that he sends his people into all corners of the world to live for him?

…not just to all geographic parts of the world,

…but into our places of work, our public services and business, our farms and shops, our schools and colleges and retirement homes, our local councils and village halls and bridge clubs.

There are lots of pictures of the church in the bible. Maybe you can think of some: the body of Christ, a royal priesthood and so on.

I like to think of the church as the secret service of the kingdom…

People infiltrating all corners of society… not to spy on them… but to bless them, to transform them with the good news of Jesus and with his wonderful life.

Now, maybe the bible doesn’t explicitly call the church a ‘secret service’.

But Jesus does liken the kingdom of God to a small amount of yeast, which when rolled into the dough causes the whole loaf to rise.

As Christians we are called not to huddle together, but to spread out… into all parts of society, so that society might ‘rise’.

And bizarrely, that “spreading out” into all corners of society might mean us staying exactly where we are.

Because the church, the people of God, is *already* present all over the place.

Now of course, God might be calling some of you to become missionaries, or clergy.

But the majority of people he simply calls to live for him where they are.

Do you remember how Jesus healed the Gerasene demoniac? Mark records it in chapter 5 of his Gospel.

Jesus arrives in the region of the Gerasenes, is met by a man possessed by many demons and heals him… sending the demons into a herd of pigs which promptly rush down a cliff into the sea. Great stuff!

The story continues:

*As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.*

Today we are starting a sermon series, and mid-week groups, following a six week course called “Life on the Frontline”.

The ministry team thought and prayed hard about this.

The aim of following this course at the start of a new year is to help us think through some important questions:

Where is my frontline? – where do I spend the majority of my time?

What might God want to do there?

How might he want to use me?

Now of course, he might want to use us to tell people about Jesus. Chances are there are some people where we spend the majority of our time who are secretly desperate to know Jesus and just need a Christian to help them work out how.

But please don’t think this is a course designed to lay a guilt trip on each of us to make us go out with our bibles and bash people over the head.

Rather we are wanting to ask the questions what is God wanting to do and how might he want to use us?

Wouldn’t we all like to see the places where we spend our time flourishing… enjoying the life in all its fulness which Jesus promised?

Wouldn’t we like to see the things with which we are involved flourish – whether it’s a business thriving making a product or providing a service, or a village hall being used for life giving social meetings?

Wouldn’t we like our “group” to operate in a way that’s honest and fair and uses the resources of the world wisely?

Wouldn’t we like to see people thrive in good relationships, free from gossip and backbiting?

Wouldn’t we like to see our frontline, the place where we spend our time, looking a bit more like Jesus was the boss?

Let me tell you a story from the book Fruitfulness on the Frontline by Mark Greene:

After living for 25 years in the same place, Peter retired and moved to a town where he didn’t know anyone. He didn’t have an obvious frontline, although there were a lot of things Peter could do, including preaching and teaching and counselling. He prayed and asked God, “What do you want me to do?”

It was a brave prayer. And a humble one. You might not get an answer you like.

For Peter, the Lord brought Jeremiah 29.7 to mind: “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile” And Peter wondered, “How can I bless the town God has brought me to?” So be prayed again. And the Lord told him to pick up litter.

And so it came to pass that on the days when Peter went on his two mile walk to, through, and from the nature reserve close to his home, he’d pray and praise God for his world and pick up litter that marred it and put it in a plastic bag. And he’d smile at people he passed on the path and say “hello”.

Pretty soon people started to say “hello” back and little conversations began. And the months passed and people would as, “Why do you do it?” “Because God loves the world he has made”.

Or they would enquire, “Are you being paid” He hasn’t been of course. And one person said “That’s a thankless task. You’ll get to heaven for that”. So Peter replied that he hoped to get to heaven not because he picked up litter but because he knew Jesus who gave his life for him. During Easter week he says “hello” to the people he normally says hello to and gives them a gift – a little wooden cross, made, he tells them, from olive wood from Israel where Jesus lives, a gift to remind us that at Easter Jesus died and rose again. And some people have indeed come to evangelistic meetings at the church.

So, as he walks, Peter the litter picker picks up litter. And drivers he doesn’t know toot their horns and wave in respect and gratitude. And then on an ordinary day like any other a white van pulls up beside him. The window rolled down and the man in the white van who had somewhere else to go and something else to do said, “Thanks very much.”

Well I wonder what strikes you about this story? In what ways has Peter been fruitful on his frontline?

Peter has modelled godly character, displaying kindness and no doubt some self control and patience as he picks up litter that is the result of other people’s lack of self control and patience and selfishness.

He has made good work, cleaning up the park.

He has taken initiative to minister to strangers with grace and love.

He has moulded the culture of the walking community in the nature reserve – it’s a friendlier place.

He has been a mouthpiece for the truth about God’s concern for creation and for the right way of stewarding it.

And Peter has been a messenger of the Gospel, telling others about why he does what he does, about his own relationship with Jesus and inviting people to find out more in a church.

And all Peter was doing was picking up litter!

Where is your frontline?

What might God want to do there?

How might he want to use you?

Let us pray:

Father God, you love everything you have made, and your plans for this world, and the part of it I live in, are good.

Please show me what you want to do in the places where I spend my time.

Use me to bring your fulness of life to the people I spend my time with.

In Jesus name,

Amen