

Is the Church silent?

Abrie Myburgh

People ask why the Church seems to be silent about the many challenges facing us in South Africa.

If we reflect on how many times churches seem to withdraw from their communities and build walls rather than bridges, it is understandable that people see the Church as silent.

We Christians can learn from the people of Jerusalem. It was the place where God had His abode.

Then there was Babylon. We see in scripture – from Genesis to Revelation – that Babylon was the antitype of Jerusalem. It represented the sins of the flesh.

And then the unthinkable happened. The Babylonians broke down the walls of Jerusalem and took the people to Babylon as captives.

Then we have the exiles sitting on a Babylonian riverbank singing “By the rivers of Babylon ...” (Psalm 137) How could they be singing when their lives seemed so dark?

They were expressing their spirituality in Babylon.

Today, some Christians use the excuse: “I cannot exercise my faith and spirituality. Within the context of the world, I must go back into a sacred place. That is where I exercise my spirituality.”

We can take inspiration from the prophet Jeremiah: “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper (Jeremiah 29:7).”

How will we bring salvation to Babylon unless the agents of Shalom understand their calling and their mission?

These were some of the major shifts in thinking that helped Doxa Deo to shift our understanding of how we need to engage with our world. We asked ourselves how we could bring peace, completeness, wholeness, health, safety, soundness, tranquillity, prosperity in to our community, our cities.

Because that is what shalom means.

How are we going to do it in a practical way?

An African proverb says it takes a village to raise a child. We see that the village influences our belief, worldview, values, conviction. The context in which you develop has a distinct influence on how you think, and you live.

Now it takes a village to raise the child, it begs the questions.... who raises the village?

Who determines what the village will believe? Herein lies the challenge - if the church is absent in that conversation, the village will be defined by humanistic individuals. Therefore, we have to engage into our world to bring the Shalom to the world.

Just for a moment envisage what our village would look like if we as a Church engage through bringing the Shalom. As Kingdom ambassadors we need to understand what this looks like.

Romans 14:17 (MKJV) “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

So how can we define this Shalom? There are three dimensions to our world:

Righteousness - Spiritual component. It shows us that people are lost and in darkness. The Bible is clear that people need to come to the revelation of Christ. How can we take faith to the city?

Joy - Social component. This has to do with the pain of the city. This is where we recognize that we must take love, to serve and to engage.

Peace - Systemic brokenness. Where the systems of our society are not in line with Kingdom living.

The difference between pain and brokenness is that pain is where people are busy drowning, and we rush in to go and save them.

Brokenness is us preventing them from being pushed into the river. That is where we as God's people bring hope.

No matter what we do in the church - whether it is worship, shepherding or discipleship, it is all in preparation for the mission of going into the world and making disciples of all the nations.

That is the calling and purpose of the church.

Ephesians 1:22-23 (MSG): At the centre of all this, Christ rules the church. The church is not peripheral to the world. The world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which He speaks and acts, by which He fills everything with his presence.

We see God in the church. We see His manifest grace in the church. And many times, we stop there.

Here is the challenge: We need to recognize that whatever God is doing in us, the empowerment that we are sensing in the church is to empower us to now carry His presence into everything around us.

This is what the Church is all about. It is our mission.

We need to understand how to position the church to engage practically within its community to make a difference in the lives of people.

The Church is not just a protesting agency which prophetically says that everything is wrong.

We are in the world, and we affect the world as the Ekklesia. The sent ones who represent God.

If we talk about City transformation, we need to understand that our voices speak to the lostness, pain and brokenness of our city and we, do it through faith, love, hope and practical interventions.

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