Mission Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

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Biblical verses: Zechariah 4:6

This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.

Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters,

I bring the greetings of Hong Kong Tsung Tsin Mission. May peace and joy from the Lord be with you in Gerlingen and all here in the service.

There have been very close interaction between Hong Kong and Gerlingen in recent years. I was here in June this year and also in 2012. We also meet delegations from Germany with representatives from Gerlingen in Hong Kong last year. Interaction strengthens relationship. Today we also have a group of people from Shenzhen Longkeu searching for the footsteps of the past missionaries. They are trying to reconstruct the history of missionaries from this place and their impacts in China.

My theme of the sermon today is Mission Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.

Background

Now let us read the Biblical verses first.

In Zechariah Chapter 4, the prophet was awakened by the angel to see a special vision. It is a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof. And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.

The Prophet did not know the meaning of the vision. In answering to his question. The angel answered this is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

The historical background of this Biblical verse is related to the return of Jews from exile. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua they were going to rebuild the temple and the Jewish State. This seemed to be an impossible task. The Lord told them that the lamps were supplied with oil without the help of human being. The impossible task is not to be accomplished by human powers, arms, wisdom or efforts, it is all by the grace and the Spirit of the Lord.

My personal experience in Genlingen also witnessed truth of this statement. I arrived two days earlier on 15 October, planned to do some feminization visits before the formal programmes started. In the evening of the date of arrival I suddenly felt dizziness, everything was moving, even could not stand or walk, then vomited seriously. Rev. Weeber and his wife immediately called the ambulance and sending me to the hospital Klinikun Ludwigsburg which is specialized in neurology and stoke treatment. I stayed there for two nights and one
day. I was told by the doctor I might not be discharged until Monday morning. If so, all the planned itineraries would be in vain. I prayed. It is not for human power to control anything. Praise the Lord, normally it takes two to three days for me to be recovered from this dizziness, but this time it takes only one day. The MRT was also arranged very fast. After various tests and examinations I was discharged on Saturday afternoon. It was a miracle. Not by might nor by power, but by God’s spirit.

Missionary work is of similar nature, it is the work of the Lord, not human being, and thus it is not affected by human weakness nor by the might and power of people’s strength.

Mission Yesterday

Missionaries came to Hong Kong and China as early as 1806, the English missionary Robert Morrison was the first one. At that time China was still under the imperial rule of the Ching Dynasty. It was not friendly to foreigners. The door of China was then opened by force. After the first Opium War in 1842, 5 ports for trade was open. Hong Kong was also ceased to Britain. After the Second Opium War in 1860 the entire China was open to foreigners. Since then some 2500 missionaries came to China.

Missionaries from the Western countries entered China with the aid of military power. This had created problems of misunderstanding.

In China, these missionaries tried to learn the local languages, writings and customs. Some of them dressed themselves as the local people and had their hair style changed. They were eager to proclaim the gospel and to save the souls, and to build churches. Apart from these, they also set up schools, teaching both male and female. They set up clinics and hospitals, cared of the poor and the blind, against the sale and killing of girls in some rural areas. This is only part of the situation early missionaries had experienced and engaged in.

Missionaries from the Basel Mission had done similar things and beyond. They tried to understand the Chinese Hakka customs. They complied dictionaries, created Romanised new Hakka writings. This is particular good for the illiterate rural areas. Even uneducated women could be able to read the Bible and write letters in the newly created Romanised characters. They were cultural ambassadors from the west.

This is a period of turmoil in China. There were both internal and external wars. The Government was unable with 1911 Revolution, the Japanese invasion as well as 1949 Liberation. There had been an Anti-Christianity Movement from 1922 to 1928. Accusing missionaries as part of the colonialism, capitalism and imperialism. The movement accelerated the self-independence of the Chinese churches established by the missionaries, including Basel Mission. The Tsung Tsin Mission was formed around 1929 and become mature in 1930s. This marked the new stage of church development in China. Rev. Wilhelm Maisch was the one who had assisted in the formation of Hakka Church independence.

In the last century, missionary were doing both gospel proclamation and social concern. All these were under the direction of the Spirit of the Lord.

Mission Today

Today missionary takes two different directions in the East and the West.
The Basel Mission and the Mission 21 take a social approach in missionary works. Their emphasis is on human rights, peace, social justices and contemporary issues like refugees, human trafficking, foreign domestic helpers, labour laws, environmental and political issues and theological education etc. The co-workers sent out nowadays are chiefly related to the above duties.

On the other hand, missionary works of Hong Kong and Chinese churches are mainly related to preaching the gospel in evangelized the heathen world (Acts 16:9). TTM has been directly involved in missionary works in Thailand, Middle East, Philippines in the area of education, Bible translation and gospel proclamation. Individual churches also support missionaries in India, Cambodia, China, Europe and Japan and the Islamic world etc. Their duties are related to gospel preaching among university students, schools, minority groups, drug addicts and the communities affected by natural disasters.

The difference lies in the interpretation of the term ‘mission’. Western countries consider more of God’s righteousness, thus missionary is an expansion of the reign of God on earth by promoting justices, peace and fairness in the society. This is in line with the teaching of St. Luke 4:18 -19 where Jesus applied the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1 in his sermon at the synagogue of Nazareth.

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\text{The Spirit of the Lord is on me,} \\
\text{Because he has anointed me to proclaim good new to the poor,} \\
\text{He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and} \\
\text{Recovery of sight for the blind,} \\
\text{To set the oppressed free,} \\
\text{To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. (NIV)}
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For Luke, salvation has six dimensions of economic, social, political, physical, psychological and spiritual.

On the other hand, church in Hong Kong still observes God’s command to spread the gospel to the rest of the world according to Matthew 28:18-20. They follow the tradition of saving individuals from eternal damnation and to evangelizing the non-Christian world. The emphasis is on individual salvation, disciple making, teaching and church building.

Despite these differences, all these are inspired by our Lord. We are just working in response to His divine calling in accordance to His divine division of labour.

**Mission tomorrow**

Mission is not static, it is dynamic and in the process of transformation. It evolves with space and time, with social and ecclesiastic context, with church institutions and theology. Mission is induced by the Trinity God, God is the sender and master of mission. His object of concern is the entire world in a holistic manner. It is however not confined to humankind, the entire creation including physical and biological sphere are God’s concern. God is in control of mission not church or institution, this is what we called Misso Dei (God’s mission). What we can do is try our best to cooperate with God. Our efforts might be helpful but not essential. Just like what the Lord had said to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit’. What will happen tomorrow is entirely in the hands of our Lord, we can only follow and try to work along with God.
Conclusion

We are now here celebrating the past achievements of missionaries sent out from Genlingen. They had done their part in fulfilling the historically call of the Lord. Their works are not in vague.

Among us today we have a team of root seekers from Shenzhen China. They are going to find out the true pictures of missionaries in the past centuries, what they had done and why they did so. They come over to see the place where missionaries were bought up. I am sure, they would find out more than they were being told about them in China. Among them there are Ms Tong and Ms Wong they have written a marvellous book on the Girl School in Longheu. This is just a small window peeping into the vast world of missionary activities in China of the last century. Yet it was a beautiful one.

After all, God is the overall in-charge of mission, church, local or ecumenical institutions alike are being sent, not senders. God is doing missionary Himself, we are witness on part of the history of Misso Dei. All these were done not by human being’s might or power but by the spirit of the Lord Almighty. Those who are working with the Lord would be blessed.

Amen.