



Dear Friends,

On our staff retreat, Kevin led a brainstorming session on evangelism at RPC. He asked the question: “Do we need to contextualise the gospel and gospel ministry at Randwick?”

Contextualisation is a word often used when talking about the church’s mission. Contextualisation is about knowing the social and cultural context in which you live and serve Jesus. I served as a student minister at a church in the Mount Druitt area. I was then appointed to a church in Canberra. There were lots of differences between the cultures in Mount Druitt and Canberra. People in Mount Druitt would share their life story - warts and all – on first meeting us. Whereas it could take years before some people would open up to us in Canberra.

When it comes to how contextualisation applies to sharing Jesus with others, Tim Keller describes it as:

Giving people the Bible’s answers, which they may not at all want to hear, to questions about life that people in their particular time and place are asking, in language and forms they can comprehend, and through appeals and arguments with force they can feel, even if they reject them.

Keller is describing here the Apostle Paul’s practice as a missionary pastor who preached Christ in a diverse range of places and cultures. Paul describes his practice in 1 Cor 9:19-21:

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews, I became like a Jew, to win the Jews ...To those not having the law I became like one not having the law.

For a person who grew up in a religious home and environment, the gospel may feel like keeping a set of rules that curtails their freedoms. They’d rather sleep in on a Sunday than go to church. They don’t want to be confined by what they see as outdated views on dating, sex, and marriage. They want to live as they please and not be subject to any authority. How do we speak the timeless truths of the gospel to such a person?

Whereas for a person who comes from a migrant background, the gospel may feel like a Western religion. They may believe that to convert to Christianity would be a betrayal of their identity, family and community. How do you share the gospel with such a person?

It helps to be aware of the kind of person we are relating to so that we can adapt how we share Jesus with them, just as Paul and Jesus did. Jesus spoke differently to a religious person like Nicodemus than he did to a Samaritan women. He revealed the truth about himself to both of them. But he adapted his message so that it connected to each of them.

It’s also helpful to know that people have common questions about themselves, about their lives and about existence generally to which the gospel has answers.

The first of these questions is about freedom. Freedom is a highly prized value in Western culture where the individual is prioritised over family and community. While we might all like to see ourselves as being free to live however we want, the truth is that we all follow someone or something. So, the question we might ask is, who or what do you follow?

The second question is about relationships. To whom do I belong? Each of us wants to be truly known and loved. The third question is about meaning. Why am I here? What is my life for? What am I to do? The fourth question is about identity? Who am I? Do I matter?

The answer to Kevin’s question is, “YES.” So, have you thought about how the gospel answers each of those key questions? And how would you adapt your response to those questions, depending on the kind of person you were speaking to?

God Bless,
Mark Adams