

'Mobilising towards Mission'

**Sermon preached by Bruce Crerar, founder of Amos Scripture Care Trust,
at St George's West Church, Edinburgh on 22nd September 2002**

I am sure that you will regularly receive unsolicited mail in your post box, encouraging you to take out loans, new credit cards, accident insurance, Chinese take-aways, Pizzas. Recently I received an unsolicited email that promised to 'restore the real you - As seen on NBC, CBS, CNN, and even Oprah! The health discovery that actually reverses ageing while burning fat, without dieting or exercise!' What a promise! How seductive! Yet even if it would work, which it doesn't, is it what I need? Is it what any of us need?

We are wonderfully created and the aging process is one of the mysteries of our creation. Yes, are joints may start to creek or swell and our stomachs may be less resilient about handling foods. But we are alive, and we are wonderfully made. Someone said to me recently, "When I was young I could tell my body what to do and it did it. Now that I am old my body tells me what I can't do and I do not like it."

I would like you all to feel that you belong to a body that tells you what you can do, and you like doing it.

But first, let us look more closely at this earth we are all part of. The first thing we notice is that fragility and vulnerability are built into the very beginning of creation.

The Golden Eagle with its majestic wingspan, started life in an egg whose shell is so fragile, a pebble dropped from a sparrow's beak could shatter it. The butterfly, before it achieved its fleetness of flight, nurtured its existence in a pupa whose static state makes it easy prey to a hungry bird. And think of a baby, often so small that it can be held in the palm of a hand. Then you begin to see the real fragility and vulnerability of creation.

In the Road Less Travelled, Scott Peck clearly describes the vulnerability of children during their journey towards adulthood. Many events in a child's life would cut it short if it were not for the power of God's Grace.

Fortunately, all of us have survived the risks of childhood, and most of us have the hope that we are growing old gracefully. Grace is the undeserved love of God. In truth, we have to acknowledge that those precious moments when we experience the love of God in our lives must be through Grace. For, notwithstanding our commitment to the church, we have done very little for God.

Society strives to protect us. We need our old age pension and our free health care. We have spent our lives contributing to society and we will go on doing so, so we deserve the protection of society. Yet society has also surrounded us with a cocoon of false confidence. Wealth has given us the education of schools, and the protection of housing and hospitals; yet society is no longer interested in being educated by God's Word or protected by His love. The successes of Western democracies have created a strange paradox. We can afford things that are forefathers would never have dreamed of, but although many have done so, we really cannot afford to let go of God.

September 11th has revealed our vulnerability to a form of terrorism that is hard to understand and even harder to grapple with. Our experience of the wars in Afghanistan, Kosovo and against Saddam Hussein have shown us that the military strength of America has enabled us to bring each war to an end without much impact on our personal lives. But this time there is greater unease. We

sense that the forces afoot that are trying to stir up Arab hatred will succeed even if a war with Iraq has a swift conclusion. It matters little that the majority of Christians and Muslims have no taste for either terrorism or war. The aim of the terrorists is to deepen the divide between Islam and Christianity and if a war achieves this, they will be succeeding in their aim.

The cocoon of false confidence that society creates within us will make us think that it will all pass us by. But it won't! And where will we stand when the growing divide between Islam and Christianity becomes apparent? Will we remain neutral? Or will we join in with the increasing number of Christians who are striving to deepen their relationship with Jesus and their understanding of Islam? Both are essentially missionary faiths, but currently Islam is the fastest growing faith in the world.

We are prepared to give our time to the church but we are reluctant to be involved in mission, because we tend to have a false perception of it. We think it is for specialists who have to take on full time training and often have to learn a foreign language. This is not so! Jesus chose ordinary people who used a local dialect to communicate their understanding of Jesus' message.

When we consider Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Sower, it becomes clear why Jesus instructed his disciples to take no goods or money with them when he sent them on their first mission. Jesus isn't saying that mission cannot be done with money. What he is saying is that mission must be done through charity, and worries about money and material things will hamper mission.

Will the world's attraction with material things provide a distraction for us? Or will you accept the challenge of mission, which, led by Islam, is the world's new agenda. You may still feel that this is not right for someone of your age or personality, but it is not as difficult as you imagine, and the cost of avoiding it may be incalculable.

I said at the beginning "I would like you all to feel that you belong to a body that tells you what you can do, and you like doing it." This body that you belong to is our church and its future role is mission.

While not forgetting the past, please help to create a new future and join in the effort with others to share the news of Jesus to our fragile society that has been cocooned with false confidence.