

Latimer's Curate

The urgent is the enemy of the important. In every aspect of life there are demands on us that are immediate. Pressing. Urgent. Things that have to be done NOW. We all feel the weight of them and the stress of having things hanging over us. Indeed, sometimes life can be so busy that it seems that everything is urgent! We all have monthly bills to pay and budgets to manage and it can be very easy to never think about saving for retirement. Sometimes managing the circus that is family life can be so time-consuming and urgent ("Put down the scissors, Jemima". "Don't eat that, Jeremy") there doesn't seem to be time to think about how to raise the children to know and love the Lord.

In our Christian lives there can also be the tyranny of the urgent (as Charles E Hummel called it). Daily prayers for Aunty Joan's sore toe or the dog's diabetes can crowd out the grand prayers of Scripture and the Prayer Book, that God's kingdom come, and his will be done. Simply getting to church (vaguely on time) can remove any opportunity for reflection on the glory and majesty of the God whom we gather to hear from and respond to in prayer and praise. Now there's nothing wrong with daily prayers and simply making it to church - my point is that if that is all there ever is, we miss out on the important, grand, and world-changing work that God is doing in and through his people.

But the urgent being the enemy of the important is seen, in this curate's limited experience, no place more clearly than in parish ministry. Particularly for the minister everything is urgent, from Vestry and committee meetings, to visiting, to programmes and making people feel welcome. There are always fires to fight, people to see, rosters to write. Again, they are all good things. They keep a parish running, and it's good that churches are run well and that things are done in order. However, they are important only insofar that they support and enable the truly important work of a Christian church - the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus' final words to his disciples in Matthew's gospel were for them

to make disciples - to proclaim his gospel that all might hear and believe - that they might be welcomed into Christ's family by baptism and then they themselves join in this work of gospel proclamation. This is the vitally important work that is entrusted to God's church, and by it all other decisions must be weighed. How does this committee further the proclamation of the gospel? How in this visit might I teach the gospel? How can my time, my energy, my skills be used to see people grow to love and know Jesus more and more.

But let's take it a step further. It's one thing to assess our current practices by the important standard of the proclamation of the gospel. And it's wonderful to start new initiatives in training or evangelism to help this gospel proclamation. It's courageous to modify what we currently do so that the gospel might be more central - maybe ensuring that time is spent in bible study at each vestry meeting, or that no conversation ends without praying about the decision made. But what needs to be stopped in your parish so that the gospel might be more clearly, faithfully, and unambiguously proclaimed? Is it that there's a particular person who is opposing the proclamation of the Bible ("we do that on Sundays, we don't need to have the Bible in this committee meeting"). They need to be removed. Graciously, with thanks and honour for their service, but the proclamation of the gospel is too important for anything or anyone to stand in its way. Is it that there's a programme which is taking time and energy from a church and it can't be reformed? It may be good, it may have a long pedigree. It may be well loved. But if it is not proclaiming the gospel and growing disciples then it has no place in a Christian church. And it must be stopped.

The urgent is the enemy of the important. But so too can be the mundane and the 'we've always done it this way'. As God's people we are called and committed to the most important thing of all - the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us give ourselves fully to it.