

## Building a missional church: Week 3 - Changed surroundings

*“Though I am free and belong to none, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.”*

(1 Corinthians 9:19)

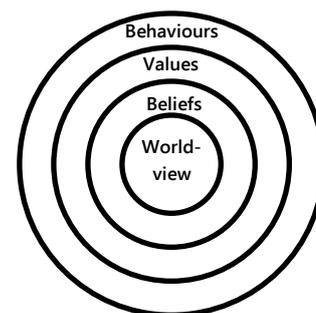
### Culture

Everything we do, think and say is determined by our culture – that’s not culture as in ‘cultured’ but rather what has been described as the lens through which we see reality.

*“Culture - The patterned way of doing things within a particular society which binds people together and gives them a sense of identity and continuity.”*

(Lloyd Kwast)

Wherever there is human community there is culture and for each of us, our perception of the world is fully convincing. Culture is often described as layered with a worldview at the centre surrounded by our beliefs and values with the outside being our behaviours. It’s been said that to change one layer you need to target the one inside it.



The church and society around us have moved so far apart that Christianity and church are such alien concepts to so many of the population that we must adopt the same consideration of cross-cultural mission as those working across the world. As we saw in our thinking about post-modernism in Week 1, if we do not so then we may simply be answering a question no-one is asking.

*Mission Shape Church* quotes George Lings as saying that for some church is “*an alien and expensive building that I wouldn’t know what to do in; worse it is occupied by people I wouldn’t be seen dead with*”.

As a way in to thinking about how we are seen by others you might want to look at what happened when Mr Bean goes to [church](#)... **How does this make you feel?**

It has been said that “*Jesus belonged to His own culture, but was prophetically critical of it*”; **what role do you think prophetic criticism has in today’s church and how can it become part of our mission strategy?**

### Cross Cultural

*“to become a Christian ... you have to find a way of living in a culture that no longer exists in everyday life.”*

(Graham Cray)

*“For some reason, religious conviction in the modern world produces in us a mixture of surprise, fascination and fright as if a dinosaur had lumbered into life and stumbled uninvited into a cocktail party.”*

(Jonathan Sacks)

It has been observed that while foreign-service missionaries spend a considerable part of their training looking at the culture of the place they will be going to, ordination trainees in this country spend time looking at the culture of the church and hardly any on the culture they would meet around them.

Pause for a moment and look at the [video](#) by Church from Scratch, an emerging Baptist church in Southend.

**What can be done in Taunton to enable the non-churched to see and hear the gospel, and experience Christian life and faith?**

### Changing Cultural Mission

In sharing any message what matters is the message received by the hearer rather than what we might be saying. The gospel has been likened to one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. But what would you make of these messages: *mae bara dros yno* or *මුද් ಅಕ್ಕದ ಒಂದಿ ?*

They both actually say, “There’s bread over there”... But the first is in Welsh and the second in Telegu. The message has been given clearly, but you cannot understand it. The same is often the case when we seek to communicate the good news to those around us but do so using what we might call ‘Christian speak’.

**Can you talk about Jesus without using any ‘Christian speak’ even for one minute? Try it.**

## Contextualisation

*“If you preach the Gospel in all aspects with the exception of the issues which deal specifically with your time, you are not preaching the Gospel at all.”* (Martin Luther)

Given that we’ve now had almost 25 years of mainstream Sunday trading and over 40 years of professional football on Sundays, why do you think our service times, as one person put it, “are set by when the cows have been milked”? **How does the gospel speak to a particular culture?**

Jesus told his first disciples: *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”* (John 13:35). The ‘this’ is of course loving one another in the same way that Jesus loved us. **Does ‘everyone’ see that love and therefore know we are his disciples? If not, what could we do about it?**

## Mission Audit

If we are to know how to reach those around us – both those living locally but also those (our *oikos* – to use the term Roger Morgan introduced us to at church weekend a few years ago) whom we interact with every day – then it is vital to know who they are. Nehemiah 2 describes how, as newly appointed governor, he found out what issues faced the people of Jerusalem.

**How well do we know our own parish? What are the groups – geographical, people and network that operate in our community?**

**What can we do to discover more about our mission field here?**

As well as actually looking at the community around us, there is a wealth of information available online, for example from the Government’s Neighbourhood Statistics [web-page](#). Enter a postcode in the ‘Neighbourhood summary’ box – you might try those of some group members or perhaps these - TA1 1EN, TA1 1JS, TA1 1XU - to get some flavour of our parish.

You will find information on factors such as employment, age, education, household status as well as an overall deprivation level. This becomes important as we seek to target messages – there would be little point in aiming to reach families if the facts show almost all the parish living in child-free homes.

Spend some time reflecting on what you have found. **In what ways does the profile of the church community differ from that in the community around us?**

## Closing reflection

Reflect on the strength we gain by not being called to go it alone as you listen to [this recording](#) of the Psalm 23.