

Just sometimes a CRITICAL INCIDENT calls for RADICAL SURGERY and there often lies the good news, and the BLESSING.

The German theologian Emil Brunner reminds us – *Our God is a missionary God who calls a missionary people.*

Matthew's gospel reminds us of a CRITICAL INCIDENT in the story of Jesus.

The 1980 eruption of Mt St Helens was one of last century's CRITICAL INCIDENTS. 250 million cubic yards of terra firma blown sky high; a velocity of 300 miles an hour; temperatures reaching 660 degrees; 230 square miles of debris raked earth; enough timber destroyed to build 300,000 two bedroom homes and the energy equivalent to 500 Hiroshimas in one.

57 human lives lost – several wonderful scientists and 50 plus sightseers, many trying to snap the photo of the century's CRITICAL INCIDENT.

Beaconsfield – with all Australia we prayed and hoped for Tasmania's Todd & Brant – and shared in the joy of blessing.

This CRITICAL INCIDENT in Mathew 16 is common to Mathew Mark & Luke. The ministry of Jesus is hotting up – this charismatic, radical, people popular figure – preaching and healing and teaching has the leading sects of Israel – the Pharisees and Sadducees and Herodians on edge, plotting and planning, They have given up praying he will waft away into the ether. Rough justice is the only way – the end must justify the means – as one of their great high priests mutters *it may be better for one man to die for the whole people.*

Jesus has again denounced the Pharisees and Sadducees. Bad weather guys – got the whole scenario wrong. They are bad yeast infecting Israel. Coming to Caesarea Philippi he asks his disciples. *Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*

*But who do you say that I am?* Quick as a whippet Peter jumps into the fray: *You are the Messiah the Son of the living God.*

*Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.*

The exegetes and the theologians have debated this troublesome text. Yes! It is a missionary text. It is foundational, futuristic, it continues the Kingdom of God message of Jesus post the cross.

But what is THE ROCK?

Some say it is Peter (this is the more catholic reading)

Some say it is Peter's faith or a Pete like faith or confession.

We Sydney preachers try to manipulate the text a little more. We read it as The Good News, the good news of the in breaking Kingdom of God. We must be right

But Matthew is a Jew. Tax collector and sinner he may have been but he knew his Old Testament and being an Old Testament man he knew you need two witnesses. Right through his gospel there are two of just about everything – 2 blind men healed; 2 of this and 2 of that. And linguistically he loves to repeat himself; John the Baptist preaches the Kingdom just like Jesus. *The Kingdom of God approaches.*

Matthew 8 holds the key

The Sermon on the Mount tells a story of 2 builders. The wise builder, she builds on a good foundation.

The shonk – you only have to watch any good current affairs program – the stories of horror and slipping foundations and loose tiles, and cracked walls he builds his house on the .... You know the story...

Across the road from my wife's late uncle is a lovely mock Spanish hacienda style. It comes on the market with monotonous regularity every 7 years... bit longer in a drought. Flash storms and a metre of water right through the house.. dries out. cupla years go by – buyers forget another sucker.. The foundations are all wrong... you do not build your house in a creek bed under the escarpment in Wollongong...

Verse 24 *Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like the wise woman who built her house on the rock.*

ON THE ROCK - EPI TYN PETRAN for the Greek scholars. And in chapter 16 “on this rock I will build my church EPI TAUTY TY PETRA – Mathew doubles us. Who, What is the rock? The Sermon on the Mount tells us – it is Jesus. Well might you build your life on him!

The word CHURCH is a bit out of the ordinary? EKKLYSIA – the called ones – we expect it in Paul – it appears only twice in the gospels. Matthew 16 & 18.

What is this CHURCH? For Matthew, the Old Testament man, whose Jesus – *comes to save his people from their sins* as the angel sang to Joseph in chapter 1, **church** means the community around Jesus, the people of god in

the old once gathered around the Father.  
Church is a gathering of people, a community  
being built.

We recap!

***Our God is a missionary God who calls a  
missionary people.***

***Our Jesus is a missionary and calls a  
missionary people.***

At that CRITICAL INCIDENT at Caesarea  
Philippi Jesus does not shy away from the  
imminent failure of his own life, his coming  
death, he does This is not, failure it is blessing.

The People of God will be built.

The People of God will be built on the  
rock – Jesus.

And even with the whiff of death there is  
the hint of blessing – ***Blessed are you... Simon  
Son of Jonah.***

Are we in the middle of a critical incident?  
Will we grasp life or death? The 2001 NCLS  
figures tell us ***that 2503 were in our  
congregation. 2000 were over 40. Half of  
those with children under 15 say that their  
own children never come to church.***

We can bury our heads in the sand and ignore  
the reality of an increasingly shrinking  
presence in our community. Worse we can give  
up, deny that reality, and face oblivion. Or we  
can look at our resources – which are enormous  
in comparison with the third world Africa and  
parts of Asia and a few decades ago South  
America and we can ask the missionary  
question all over again.

Remember, God is building his people and a  
new creation. We read from Isaiah. ***For I am  
creating new heavens and a new earth; the  
former things shall not be remembered or  
come to mind.***

God invites us  
*Be glad and rejoice forever in what I am  
creating;  
For I am to create Jerusalem as a joy and its  
people as a delight;  
I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my  
people; no more shall the sound of weeping be  
heard in it or the cry of distress.*

We are in Middle Earth!

Saint John the Divine paints a picture of the  
end time –of the blessing

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth;  
and I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem,  
coming down out of heaven prepared as a  
bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud  
voice –*

*“See the home of God is among mortals; He  
will dwell with him as their God; they will be  
his people; God himself will be with them.  
He will wipe away every tear. Death will be no  
more.*

We the missionary people of God are that  
bride. The husband is the Christ – the  
announcer of the Kingdom of God. The  
Kingdom message is God rules; The Kingdom  
is about the total recreation of this earth; the  
kingdom is about perfect and eternal  
relationship.

Do we fear that we are irrelevant? Our  
churches are fragile and many of us have arctic  
blond hair.

21<sup>st</sup> century life is worse - our chaotic, busy harassed communities. See what it offers for pleasure – porn after 11, Makers and Game Boys for kids instead of wholesome parental love (the parents do not have time they are busy buying the game boys and the McMansions), false security in consumerism. Look at the tree huggers and the idealists – the Greenies and the alternatives – but they do not really have the answer.

Jesus is relevant! . He offers meaning. He offers a worldview that promises life's answers from parenthood to the recreation of the planet. And better still this Jesus promises. "I will build my church." Why even the shuddering doors of hell will not beat it." He is the designer, facilitator and enabler.

My 4 kids are pretty intelligent Gen X-ers. They are today's adults aged 24 to 30 something. A recent article in the Melbourne Age was entitled *Selfish Baby boomers must*

*make way for their successors.* Gen Xers your children and grandchildren if they are like mine are looking for meaning, they seek for a way of life that works in community, and they unashamedly speak of the spiritual dimension of life.

Matthew finishes his Jesus story -  
*Go into the world and make disciples of all nations; baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to obey all I have commanded, and remember I am with you always to the end of the age,*

What are Gen Xers looking for?

**Meaning** – baptism in the name of the Father Son & Holy Spirit is a meaning thing. An incorporation thing – a belonging. Gen Xers are saying our world is chaotic – you boomers and busters are probably part of the problem,

**A way of life that works** – a disciple follows the discipler and lives a discipline, a way of life. The sermon on the Mount – blessing in adversity; the radical call to peace and forgiveness followed by the likes of Mandela, Martin Luther King, Ghandi and Tutu... turning the other cheek more powerful than a 1000 Hiroshimas

The Spiritual dimension – *I am with you to the very end of the age*. The Holy Spirit leads, directs, sustains, comforts...

Bill Hull says, “Disciplemaking is not one of the things the church does; **it is** what the church does.

I am not yet one of you. But I see a Tasmanian church full of potential missionaries. We are people rich.

We have the best news. It promises blessing. It is relevant and powerful.

75% of people of faith come to faith before the age of 12. Will we open our churches to families?

Leaders will be high trust believing in lay ministry. Engaging the whole people of God where God has gifted them to be - in church, at the work place, in the coffee shop, school... and God will bless us.

We will be proactively Christian – not just with Anglicare and not just ensuring our church schools are thoroughly Bible focussed but we will be light and salt in our daily lives and we can do it. The Holy Spirit walks with us....

Most people need 200 acts of Christian kindness before listening to the messenger. The good News of Jesus is inherently incarnational. Love them and then talk the words of love.

We will purposely pray and plan for mission.

Watch out for SchoolBliz. Not on TV with the churches in Launceston – 300 Christians are descending on a government school in bad shape – painters and plumbers and gardeners and electricians – and people like me who should not go up the ladder – Christ incarnate in School Bliz will bring blessing.

*Our Jesus is a missionary and calls a missionary people.*

Will this Synod grasp the task and will we and our people believe it?

*Transforming God*, as we meet together fill us with your wisdom. Give us the capacity to work boldly and with humility, embracing the challenge of mission. Use us to bring transforming life to our Christian communities and all Tasmanians. Through Jesus Christ our Lord **Amen.**