



WEBINAR- FROM EXILE TO EARTHQUAKE: METAPHORS FOR MISSION IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

Video to 6 min.

The context of this conversation, as Alan Roxburgh explains, is the Covid-19 crisis and the question from church leaders and others: 'What's next?' In the light of this Alan and Martin Robinson reflect on the metaphors leaders have used to understand mission and the place of the church in the western world. One of the primary metaphors is exile. This expression, alongside others like marginalized or minority, has been used to convey the idea that Christians have been displaced, that we are now

outsiders in society. There is a sense of 'over against' in this language. As all metaphors it is powerful, in that it is emotive, it shapes how we see ourselves and how we see the world. It disposes us to act in particular ways. Yet Alan challenges this metaphor, in that he has not found that his neighbours are antagonistic to faith. And we have not been displaced, nothing has been taken from us. Unlike the exiled Judeans we are very much in our own contexts.

Video 6 min to 12 min.

Martin describes an alternative metaphor which has its roots in the missionary journey of Acts 16 and Paul's vision of a Macedonian man. As Paul arrives in Philippi not only is he unable to find a Macedonian man, he is unable to follow his usual strategy for mission. In this disorientating place there is no synagogue, he has no script for this setting. He has to re-imagine mission and this leads to two encounters, first with Lydia, and then with a prison, a jailor and an earthquake which impacts the whole society. From this story then comes the new metaphor, that of earthquake. The whole of our society is being shaken, and we are not observers, we are participants trying to understand. We seek to be blessings and gifts to others and engage with others. We are all in this together and we are not in exile.

Video 12 min to 13 min.

In this unfamiliar setting we are trying to discern what God is up to. There are no road maps but we ask 'in the midst of turmoil and tragedy what will a new future look like?' Alan suggests that it is this felt loss of maps which has caused us to feel that we are in exile. But in fact Christendom is long gone and it is outside the memory of younger people. For most of us exile makes no sense in this new space.

Video 13 min to 22 min.

From this point Alan and Martin go on to interact with questions from the webinar. One of the participants reminds them that in the story of Elijah God speaks not in an earthquake but in a whisper. The questioner wonders how we may listen to the God's whispers now. In the recent webinar with Maurice Glasman, [Preparing for a New Chapter](#), Maurice proposed some radical ways to engage with our communities. But this is very disorienting for clergy for whom familiar practices, church services and visitations are no longer appropriate. Like Paul, in this disorientation we need to depend on God as agent, not ourselves with our strategies and plans.

Video 22 min to 40 min.

A webinar participant points out that the earthquake was underway before the coronavirus hit, in the wider unraveling of western culture. Alan and Martin agree. In Maurice Glasman's paper he highlighted several shocks for the West: the financial crash, Brexit, Trump and Covid-19. Many people have felt excluded from society. But the shaking has led to an opportunity to explore what really matters in our lives: our primary relationships, place, land and food and the working people who have sustained our communities. The Spirit, through our doctors, has advised 'stay in place'. This has been an opportunity to awaken to our own immediate neighbourhoods and the people there. These encounters may surprise us. The church in Philippi was built from an encounter with Lydia, with a slave girl and a jailor. Martin tells us that these sort of experiences have been shared by church planters at work across cities in Europe, who find that around them there is a new willingness to connect. We need to spend time with

diverse leaders and learn from one another's experiences of connectedness.

Video 40 min to 49 min.

Paul's missionary encounter in Athens (Acts 17: 16-34) had a pandemic as a backdrop Martin tells us. The altar to the unknown god in the city reflected this history. We will also need to find unique opportunities for mission for each context, and perhaps with the people we would least expect. Another metaphor, diaspora, is similarly unhelpful according to Alan, the language of white middle-class people who have lost power, but the actual diaspora, migrants from Africa and Asia have the potential to be partners in mission for the indigenous churches.

Video 49 min to 53 min.

Alan suggests that we are tempted to find particular metaphors because we no longer have road maps. But Paul experienced this dislocation and found himself, as a Jewish man, sitting talking with a group of women on a river bank. Martin's concluding challenge therefore is that we re-read Acts and listen to what the Spirit is saying. One participant comments that we will need metaphors as we begin to shape 'What's next?'. So Martin promises that the Journal will be inviting further conversations in this area. In the meantime he concludes with the invitation that we be 'less busy, more attentive'.