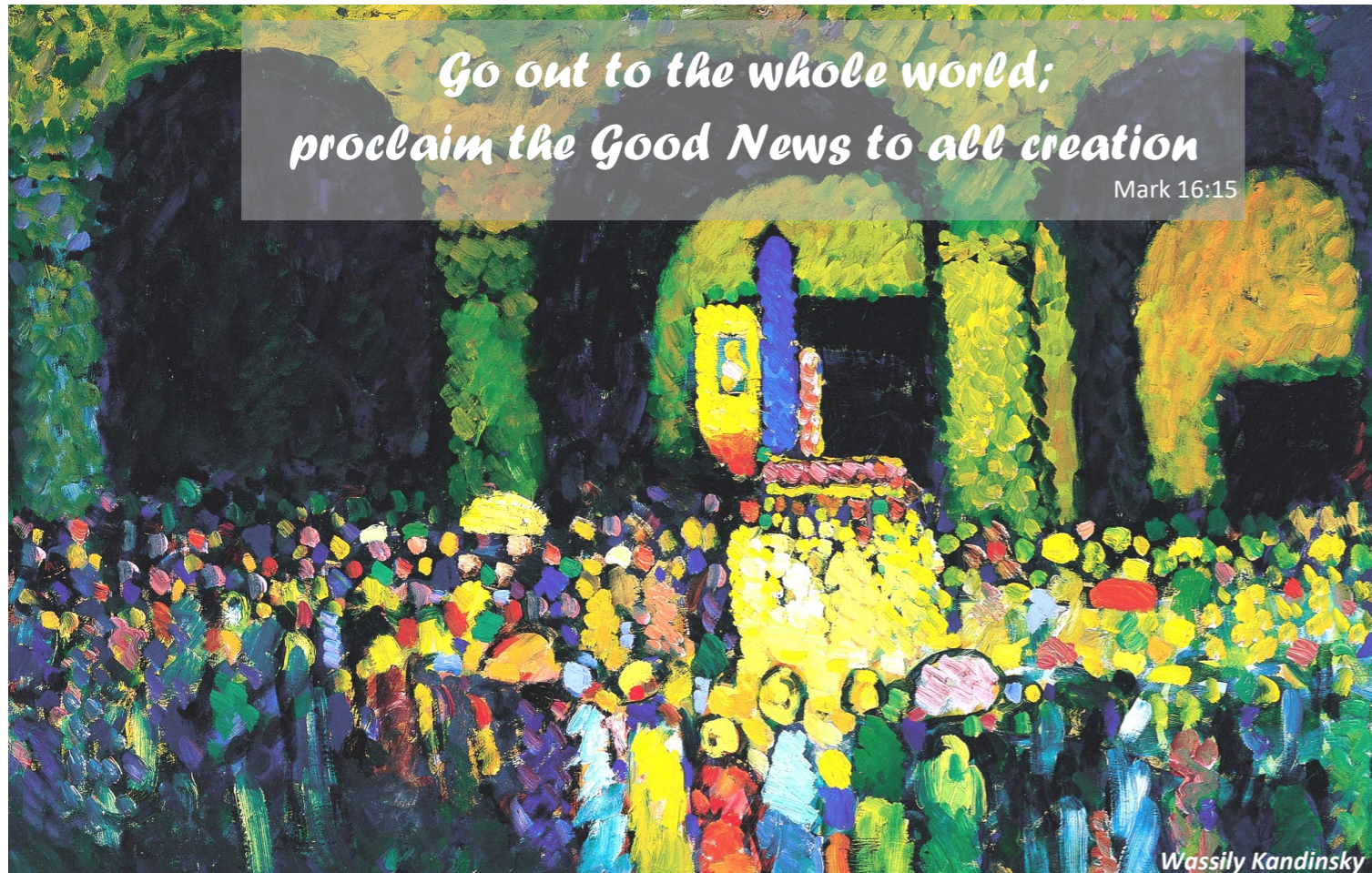


*Go out to the whole world;  
proclaim the Good News to all creation*

Mark 16:15



Wassily Kandinsky

### GOING OUT WITH THE LIGHT OF FAITH

Wassily Kandinsky, the artist who painted the above picture, lived across the road from St Ludwig's church in Munich. He lived a rather bohemian lifestyle and was thought to be an atheist. He noticed a procession of people emerging from the church, and has captured the vibrancy of a community going out to proclaim their faith in a procession through Munich. The painting illustrates what this weekend's Gospel is asking each of us to do; go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

The early Christian communities were bound together by a strong sense of the mission to which they were called. They were known as 'people of the Way' who had heard the call to live in the way that Jesus had shown them. For baptised Christians, that call is as it was for the first Christians, to follow Jesus in seeking to bring about the reign or the kingdom of God in the everyday circumstances of our life and work. That is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis adds the description of being missionary, of 'going out', as part of

discipleship. He writes that "Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but that we are always "missionary disciples". n 120

### THE REIGN OF GOD

The reign of God was Jesus' abiding passion; he was driven by it; it alone explains what he was on about, how he saw his mission, and who he was perceived to be. He told parables about it, he sought to embody it by the way he acted, in his table fellowship and in the primary focus of his ministry, the outcasts, the marginalised, the sinners.

The reign of God likewise, for the church, should be the main game. Everything we do must be related to helping God reign in the world. All we say about leadership and ministry is only secondary to and a function of the mission of the church. And that is? To be on about the reign of God.

Rev Associate Professor Ormund Rush

### THE DREAM OF THE REIGN OF GOD

The crowd gathered around the old woman. Someone in the back asked, "to what would you compare the reign of God?" For a long time there was silence. Then the woman said: "The reign of God is like a sound. It is the most natural sound in the world. Its melody plays through the hollow places in trees and mountains and in people's hearts. "Jesus could hear this sound approaching. 'Listen,' he would say, 'the reign of God is at hand.' He heard this sound playing in children, among the outcasts, when friends gathered to share a meal. Jesus kept moving until he reached a place where he would find its rhythm; then he would sit down and listen.

"The reign of God is like a sound. It is the most delicate melody in the world. External noises drown it out; internal rumblings mask it. We hear it for a moment or a day, but then it is gone. No one of us can produce this mysterious sound on our own. But we can hunt out the places and people where it plays. We can search for the frequency of its transmission. When we find this sound, we have to hum along."

After the woman finished speaking, the crowd remained silent for a long time, listening.

Evelyn & James Whitehead, *Community of Faith* (Connecticut: Twenty Third Publications 1992):74

### GOD IS MISSION

A few years ago, I began to realise that our God, the God revealed to us by Jesus of Nazareth through the power of the Holy Spirit, might be best described as a verb, not a noun. What I mean by this is that the God we know from revelation might be best imagined not as a static kind of "person", sort of like us but wiser and more powerful, who is "up there" or "out there". Rather, in a way that is much more exciting and worthy of adoration and love, God is a Movement, more personal than we can ever imagine, who is always and everywhere present in God's creation, present in the warp and woof of it, working for creation's wholeness and healing, calling creation to its fullness, and calling women and men on a small planet in a minor galaxy in this vast universe, billions of years old, billions of light years in extension, into partnership in God's work. These women and men, Genesis tells us (1:26-27), God created in the divine "image and likeness."

Nothing about God is static. One of our greatest theologians, Thomas Aquinas, spoke of God as pure act. God is not even static within Godself as such. God in God's deepest identity is a relationship, a communion. This life in communion spills out into creation, healing and sanctifying, calling all of creation, according to its capacity, into that communion, and once in that communion, sending that

creating, redeeming, healing, challenging that creation. God is like an ever-flowing fountain of living water, poured out on earth through the Holy Spirit and actually made part of creation through the Word-become-flesh.

### THE MISSION HAS A CHURCH

Gradually, as Jesus' disciples experienced his living presence among them, and especially after the extraordinary experience that took place some fifty days after his death, on the day of Pentecost, they realised they had been given the task to continue Jesus' mission of proclaiming, demonstrating and embodying God's Reign.

### THE MISSION HAS US

The church comes to be as the church engages in mission, as it crossed the boundary of Judaism to the Gentiles, and realised that its mission is the very mission of God; to go into the world and be God's saving, healing, and challenging presence. This is why we can say, with Vatican II's document on missionary activity, that the church is "missionary by its very nature (*Ad Gentes 2*) Mission precedes the church. Mission is first of all God's: God in the world through the Spirit, God in Jesus' teaching, healing, including suffering. Almost incredibly, as an act of grace, God shares that mission with women and men. Mission calls the church into being to serve God's purposes in the world. The church does not have a mission, but the mission has a church.

**The reign of God is governance for the sake of communion. It entails a radical reordering of existence: our attachments, our familial relationships, our worship, our fears and anxieties, our way of relating to others.**

Catherine LaCugna *God For Us*

Imagine what our church would be like if Christians really understood this and took it seriously. The church is about what Jesus called the Reign of God.

Stephen Bevans SVD

Extracts from a Conference Paper March 2009

