

Koinonia-Fellowship -Heart Stuff - Calling Out To God- Preaching Notes

November 2021

Heart Stuff 6

Calling Out To God

After some months of preaching *Koinonia-Fellowship*, as theory and application, while listening to local conversations in St Matt's I feel it's time to go a level deeper and get really practical on some core issues.

I am going to ask a few questions to keep it interactive.

To recap, we have talked several times about the great high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17: This is what Jesus really wants!

²¹ May they all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17
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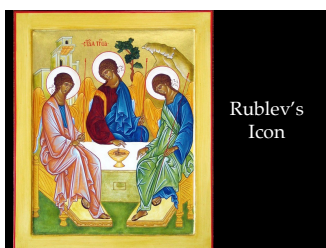
Jesus prays that the life of his church, those he had called to himself then and those like us who would come later, may be in Father-God as he himself was in the Father AND, that the life of himself and the Father might be in them, us – his church.

Jesus wants deep spiritual intimacy.

Jesus is praying for relationship to the extent of sharing life at a deep level.

He is praying that we and God be bosom friends.

This is what God had extended to Adam and Eve who eventually passed it over for a dubious offer for personal knowledge and independence. Jesus is praying that the intimacy between The Father, himself and those he called to be his church may be re-established anew.



That is the essence of *koinonia-Fellowship*, a shared participation in the life of God.

That is what Rublev's Icon is depicting around a table.

First Question:

Q1: Do we actually really want what Jesus prays for here?

Do we share that prayer with more than a casual 'Amen'.

A1: Yes, No, Sort of, Maybe, Depends ?

Q2: How does this spiritual intimacy that Jesus prayed for comes about?

Q3: Where does it happen?¹

¹ A clue is asking where do we naturally learn intimacy as people? Surely in families?

A2 & A3: Church

- Church is Jesus’ provision and calling for where we realise what he prays for.
- Church is the setting for the corporate spirituality that is Christianity.
- Church is where we grow and affirm our shared relationships
- Church is where we celebrate Gods saving work to date in Jesus Christ and anticipate the completion upon his return.
- Then through Church we are revealed to creation and a broken world as children of God.
- Church is where we are healed and learn.

That all sounds great, Yes?

Q4: Do you want more of that intimacy with God in us and we in him? Y/N/?

Q5: Do you feel we are living that here at St Matthew’s? Y/N/?

A5: My answer:

There are moments when I do sense that but they are few.
 We are not really swimming in God and savouring his presence among us.

It’s a lacking priority we want to address.

.....

Discussion:

I see a number of things that get in the way of our being deep into God and allowing God to be deep into us. I’d like to talk about them. You may see more too?

I’ll name two sets of spiritual issues I think we need to look at and change if we really want progress in Fellowship as Jesus prayed for.

The first is mainly cultural and will be set out in words. The second is about our model of church which I’ll set out in pictures.

God’s mission to redeem creation from the powers of darkness centred on Jesus and continues in his church.

- He calls a people out of the world to be salt and light in the world he loves.
- In every culture Jesus calls a people in to be a kingdom themed contrast to their culture, in it but not of it, living in that context as citizens of heaven in a broken world.

In Dunedin God calls Kiwis -both new and old- to be Kiwis in a Christ-like way thus showing this society what God’s redemption looks like through a Kiwi church. The Christian Church in this nation is called to be a counter-cultural Kiwi society that stands out as distinct as transformed Kiwis.

This is the intended outworking of God in us and us in God

In the first centuries of the church in Rome, people noticed a few distinctives about Roman Christians. The big ones were that they did not kill their unwanted babies and stayed in the city to care for people when plague broke out. That was counter-cultural and caught the attention of many people in a society that was brutal with little respect for the weak and fragile.

Standard Kiwi Culture shares a few values common across the Western World today. I'll just name 2, **Individualism and Consumerism.**

Rather than thinking group, family, whanau, nation or congregation the typical Pakeha Kiwi thinks as an individual with themselves as the centre of the universe. "I reckon...." This explains much of why our imagined team of 5 million struggles to respond corporately to an epidemic.

So let me ask:

Q6: Is the mind of Christ Individualistic?

A6: Absolutely not! cf. Philippians 2:4-8

⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

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Philippians 2

Q7: So are Kiwi church members meant to be individualistic or looking to the interests of others and the church living in the life of God?

A7: The culture says, "Yes", Christ says "No".

One place to listen for where we are in this -simply swimming in the surrounding culture or deep in our baptism in Christ- is at church meetings. Do we hear self-referenced individualism as is standard for Kiwi culture—"I like", "I want", "I prefer", "I expect...", or do we hear the mind of Christ seeking what is precious to God and God's glory in his people? Do we hear love that is willing to sacrifice? Do we hear intelligence applied to discerning what is pleasing to the Holy Spirit and to us? We may begin by asking what we ourselves say?

Another feature strong in Kiwi culture and in much of the world today is Consumerism. This is not new and it has even been used to grow churches. The biggest brightest churches have big carparks with comfortable seats offering a positive worship experience.

The diagnostic question to ask ourselves on this is whether we are in church to get or to give? Are we a servant or a consumer?

Q8: What is the mind of Christ on this?

A8: We need to choose to seek God's life as our common life as Jesus prayed because that is what makes us church. That is Christian Spirituality *ala* Jesus. For Kiwis that requires a letting go of both individuality and consumerism in transformed minds that live to see Christ in Community and live to give rather than get.

If we want to be God's counter-cultural presence of salt and light in Kiwi society, an answer to Jesus' prayer, we need to leave Consumerism and Individualism and behind.

Unless we repent of those standard Kiwi values -Individualism and Consumerism- we will fail as a church of contrast, a people of witness. We will have not salt value. People will just see a bunch of socially conservative Kiwis talking about God without anything to show for it.

Let me now come at this from another angle and in pictures instead of concepts. I have developed three pictures to illustrate how church people do fellowship.



Firstly, there is the cruise-liner church. Cruise-liners are cities on the water. They have a captain, a crew and lots of passengers. Passengers pay their money and turn up to enjoy the cruise being fed and entertained according to the passage they paid for.

It's not hard to compare that with many churches is it? Some people still want and expect this. They want to be passengers - or perhaps crew working with the captain. Some may want to be captain.

The cruise-liner is self-powered. It has fuel and an engine to go wherever the captain and crew decide or the passengers want. They take note of the weather to not upset the passengers but that's about it. The wind can do what it wants and the program will continue.

Another type of church is modelled by the racing yacht. This has a captain and a crew but no passengers. It has no engine and relies totally on the wind for propulsion. The captain and crew are always thinking about the wind. The crew are all active and work as a team aware of each other. Everyone matters on a racing yacht.



Finally for some, the church is a collection of speed boats for a driver and perhaps one or two passengers. This is self-propelled, powerful and can come and go at will. So long as there is fuel in the tank this boat for one or two does not need the wind and can even go against the wind if they wish.

Q9: What sort of boat best enables Church to participate in the life of God?

Q10: What sort of boat would grow Christ-like people?



Q11: Are you living church as if on a cruise-liner, a racing yacht or a speed boat?

Application

When churches are big and busy these issues can be left unanswered and swept under the carpet and the show goes on. If everything is running well with bulging children's ministries and mission programs what does it matter if you are a cruise-liner or a collection of power boats?

If all the seats are taken every week what does a little individualism and consumerism matter?

If there are plenty of people available to do the necessary work in staffing the boat then a few speed-boats nipping in and out don't matter.

When things are easy a mindset of self-sufficiency develops. "We can do this."

It's a consequence of Adam and Eve's bad choice filtering through. "We have options, we have levers to pull, we have power in reserve, we have programs we can run. We can be church our way, or even I can do church my way."

When church seems to be going well -as it did for many decades here and elsewhere- we might not feel the need to be sharp with Jesus and his prayer.

- Why be one with people I don't like or get on with if I don't have to?
- Why work with people who hold me back?
- Why live with unpredictable winds if we can power ourselves?
- Why bother with bothersome crew when powerful technology can do it all?

It would not be a surprise to hear that we at St Matthews are not in such a place now.

We are a remnant, a small church with limited options.

We don't have an engine powered boat.

We don't have an abundance of crew.

We need a fulfilling of Jesus' prayer in the wind of the spirit with a united crew.

As I have been saying today: We need to be very clear that being church is essentially about a community of people sharing together in the life of God. That's the main business and unless we make it the main business this church will likely go under and close as so many churches do leaving an historic building behind to sell off.

I don't believe that is God's plan for us.

Q:12 So what must we do?

A:12 Turn to God and make him central!

Call on the name of the Lord at every opportunity.

Pray and press into God as if our life depends on it.

Bring our real life into the shared life with God here on Sunday.

Why Turn to God in this way? - because we are dying without him.

A verse from Jeremiah shouts this loudly to me Jeremiah 2:13

¹³ for my people have committed two evils:

they have forsaken me,

the fountain of living water,

and dug out cisterns for themselves,

cracked cisterns

that can hold no water.

We need to return to God as the fountain of living water and forget about our cracked cisterns representing all devices at self sufficiency.

Action

Towards this what we want to lead us into on Sundays is push into a deeper level of prayer where we call on the name of the Lord in things that matter.

Only God can revive this church, we can't.

We need to let go of any self-sufficiency to call out to God for his life, because we really need it!

A deeper level of prayer needs to be central and not something a few enthusiasts do every now and then during the week or such.

Core business deserves prime time.

It's about joining in with Jesus in his prayer, "May we be in you and you in us."

Q:13 *Comment?*

I have two scriptures to get us going here: Romans 8:26-27

²⁶ ... the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

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So, as we begin to pray, seek the Holy Spirit's guidance for how to pray.

PRAYER

Appendix

I have done this and for me I go to Psalm 130

Psalm 130

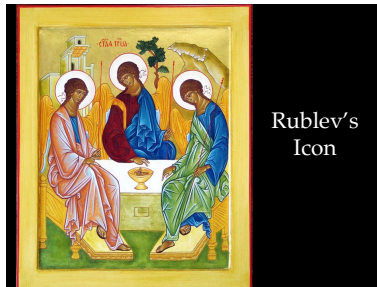
¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.
² Lord, hear my voice!
 Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my
 supplications!
³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord,
 who could stand?
⁴ But there is forgiveness with you, so that
 you may be revered.
⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his
 word I hope;

Psalm 130

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
 more than those who watch for the
 morning,
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 morning.
⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!
 For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
 and with him is great power to redeem.
⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel
 from all its iniquities.

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