

Why Church? – True Community

1. What do you value from the different 'communities' you belong to? (may be different things in each place)
2. What do you contribute to these communities?
3. Read Acts 2:42-47
4. This is describing what the church did in its early days, how much of this should we take as a blueprint in today's church?
5. From those few verses, what is distinctive about the church community compared to other communities?
6. From reading the description of Pentecost in the verse before this, we see that the church very quickly became a diverse church. How did the church cope with the diversity, what did they do?
7. Think about St Paul's specifically. We are an international church with people from all around the world. On the surface we look like a diverse church do you feel that the diversity goes deeper? (it would be good to hear different peoples experiences, especially from those who aren't British, *a bit of a clue as to where the conversation might go!!*)*
How do you think we as members of the church can make sure that the church continues to be diverse?
8. Look at verse 45. How do we approach this verse today? Is this something we should aspire to do ourselves, is it a principle but how it is worked out will be different....?
9. How do you understand the sentence 'enjoying the favour of all the people.' (v47) What would that look like for St Paul's? How do we get there?
10. What would it have been like living in a time when daily people were being saved? Is this something we should expect, pray for, desire....? Who can your group be praying for that they will be saved?

* If your group don't have much to say on this topic then I would love you to explore this topic. It is one of my sadness is that since we have moved to meeting in Duisburg the in person services have become more white. Has anyone noticed this? Is there anything we can do to readdress this?

Why Church? – Worship

In this study we will be focusing on the act of corporate worship, mostly singing and praying when we gather together (but not exclusively). The majority of our worship takes place in our ordinary everyday lives. Most of that we have been able to continue on our own or in our families over the last 6 months. As our sermon series is asking the question 'Why Church?' we will look at an aspect of worship that requires us to gather and be together but it doesn't diminish the concept of whole life worship. (We have study notes on our website from the beginning of 2020 'Frontline Sunday' if you want to look at that)

We can only scratch a very small part of the surface that is 'corporate/gathered worship'. These questions touch on several different ideas and don't necessarily all flow from one to another. You may choose to ignore some questions in order to carry on a deeper conversation about one particular area.

1. How would you describe corporate worship and its impact in your life?
2. If we can worship on our own, through our attitude to work and relationships. If we can worship by listening to professional worship leaders and their bands wherever we are at the press of a couple of buttons on our phones, why should gathering together to worship be necessary?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 11.18, 1 Corinthians 14.23, Acts 2.42-47. What assumptions do these passages make about what followers of Jesus will do. (or what did they tell us they did)?
4. What are some of the things we are instructed to do when we gather? (Colossians 3.16, Ephesians 5.19)
5. Nowhere in the New Testament is the form or the practice of worship specifically described. What we know about it is picked up in references here and there, some written to correct improprieties in church meetings. What do these passages tell us about gathered worship (type in *italic* is for leaders notes)
 - a. Acts 16:25; 1 Cor 14:15; Eph 5:18; Col 3:16. *Singing included psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and was considered a way of communicating God's truth about God to each other, encouraging each other, and expressing thankfulness.*
 - b. Acts 2:42,62; 20:7; 1Cor 11:17-34 *The Lord's supper*
 - c. Acts 2:47; Hebrews 13:15 *Praise*
 - d. Acts 2:42; 1Cor 14; Eph 4:7-16; Col 3:16 *Teaching God's truth*
 - e. Acts 2:42; 12:5,12; 1Cor 11:1-5,15; Eph 6:18-20 *Prayer*
6. Read Hebrews 10.19-25. What is being described here, what is the privilege we have been given? Why is it important that we are encouraged to do this together?
7. With reference to this passage (and any others that are relevant) would you agree or disagree with the statement that 'worship gatherings aren't always spectacular, but they are always supernatural'?
8. How important are our Sunday gatherings to you? What position do they take in your expression of worship through the week?

9. Read Psalm 63:1-4, 1 Timothy 2:8, Psalm 141:1-2, Psalm 28:2, Psalm 134:2, 1 Kings 8:54 – What do they all have in common about worship/prayer?... Have you ever worshiped with raised hands? How did that posture change your perspective of God? How did it change your expression of worship?

Equipped for Serving

1 Peter 4: 7 – 11

1. Peter begins with the words “the end of all things is near.”

Why do you think this is an important perspective for Peter?

2000 years later, do we think it is still as true now as it must have felt then?

2. Peter brings together the heart and mind – “be of sober mind” and “love each other deeply”

Why is it important to hold these two together?

For most of us, we might find one of these easier than the other. Why do you think that is? What do we need to learn from that, and how might we help each other in finding the right balance?

3. “Love covers a multitude of sins”

How might this verse be similar and different to the phrase “sweep everything under the carpet” ?

How practically do we do this in a church? Does it depend on that nature of the sins?

How does Jesus do this for us?

What is the same/different about the way Jesus does this for us and what we can do for each other?

4. The idea of gifting is really important to the early church.

Is it right to think of ability and gifting as being from God?

How can we best help one another in seeing the ways in which we are gifted by God?

What does the idea of gifting tell us about the way in which the church should be?

What practical steps do we need to put in place to allow people’s gifts to be used?

How do we help and understand those who are unwilling or reluctant to serve?

5. Peter says to serve “with the strength that God provides.”

How do we learn to do the things that we are not naturally good at?

What enables us to trust God to provide strength when we feel we are not going to manage otherwise?

What are the things we don’t do, because we are over reliant on the things we know we can do?

How do we help one another listen to the promptings of God, to do the things he would have us do?

6. v11 says “so that in all things God may be praised”

How can we allow our serving to be seen by the wider community so that God may be praised?

How do we talk about our serving and gifting? Does it bring God praise?

Are there ways in which we could grow our serving and outreach beyond the church?

7. Service touches on identity, purpose and belonging.

How can we grow in our ability as a church in helping people see their true identity as belonging to God’s family and His people?

We need to work to care and provide for those we love, and to give back to church and society. Yet if we are to hold on to our true purpose in Christ, how best can we navigate the competing calls on our time, energy and service?

Is it possible do you think to truly belong to a church family and not be involved in serving in some way?

Learning and Growing

Psalm 78

Questions to explore the theme:

- What do I most like about learning?
- What do I find hardest about learning?

Asaph gives clear instructions – listen to my teaching. He does this as he knows that he speaks on God’s authority and is speaking God’s truth to the people.

- What is our understanding of God’s word?
- How much do we listen to it?
- How much heed do we give it?

Asaph speaks of parables – this is a way of teaching that uses comparatives to teach, like Jesus does with the wise and foolish builders. Behind this use of parables is the idea that there is a right way to live and a way that is not right.

- What are the advantages of being compared to others?
- Why can we sometimes struggle when compared to others?

Asaph talks of things that they have heard, things that they have known. It draws our attention to different ways of experiencing God’s truth.

- Why is it important that Biblical truths ring true in our lives?
- What is the place of stories that we have not experienced?
- Should we expect our experience of God to be similar to the experience of those we read about?
- How do we manage our expectations of God if our experience of him is different to what we read about in the Bible?

Psalm 78 compares God’s people’s actions to God’s actions.

- Why is this so encouraging for us?
- What does it help us learn about ourselves?

A key part of the early part of Psalm 78 is that there is a responsibility for God’s people to keep on telling the message of what God has done?

- Why is it important to do?
- What happens when we don’t?

- Is this the responsibility of set people in church (e.g. splash leaders) or something we must all do?
- Is this responsibility something that should just be done to children in the church family or do these verses require us to go beyond that?

The reason for learning lessons, according to Asaph, is so that people will set their hope in God.

- How do we do this in a world where so much is about depending on our human ability to solve issues?
- What does setting our hope in God look like, when we are in a world that is in increasing difficulty?
- How do we answer people who tell us that God has abandoned us?

Some questions to think on at the end, or perhaps to reflect on later:

- What do I most need to learn again (or learn for the first time) from Psalm 78?
- What might God be want me to teach about him to those around me?
- In what areas of my life do I need to grow, so that I am a more effective teacher for the Lord?

Why Church? – Jesus

Philippians 3.7-14

1. Describe something in your life that is valuable to you. Why is it so valuable?
2. What is it that Paul counts as loss? (4-6) How would this list have sounded in first century Judaism, why might Paul have wanted to hold on to these things?
3. What are some of the ways this applies to us today? What areas of our lives might we be tempted to hold on to, even in our new life in Christ?
4. What do you need to count as loss and garbage in order to grow your relationship with Jesus?
5. What does it mean to 'know Christ', 'gain Christ' and to be found in him?
6. Verses 9-11 are a quick summary of the Gospel, what does 'righteousness' mean here? Why is righteousness that comes from Christ so much better than that which comes from the law?
7. How does the idea of sharing in Christ's sufferings challenge you? What do you understand by this?
8. What are the things we are to forget? How easy is it do that?
 - a. Perhaps have a moment of reflection and think about what are some of the things that you personally need to forget? If you're group feel safe enough it might be helpful to share and pray for one another.
9. What do you think the goal is that Paul is talking about? When you hear it read, what images or concepts spring to mind?
10. How might a greater focus on this help us to live our lives focused on Jesus?

Surrounded by Witnesses

Hebrews 12: 1-3

1. Have you ever run a marathon or a half marathon or indeed any form of long-distance race? How did you feel at the start, half way round the course and towards the finishing line?
2. Read the passage, Hebrews 12: 1-3. The writer likens the Christian journey to a long-distance race. Do you find this image helpful? What do you like about it and what, if anything, do you find unhelpful?
3. Who are 'the great cloud of witnesses' mentioned in verse 1? How many of them can you name (without looking!)? Do you find their presence and example encouraging as you run your spiritual race?
4. The writer tells us that we must 'throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.' What are the things in your life which cause you to stumble and lose your way?
5. The writer sets great store by perseverance. Why do we find it so difficult to persevere and endure in the face of hardship and setbacks. Can you give any examples in your life of times when you have had to dig deep to stay on course? How did your faith help you?
6. How can Jesus help us to stay the Christian course (verses 2 and 3)? Examine these verses in detail to see how Jesus can be our role model and inspiration.
7. The writer draws attention to the great cloud of witnesses of the Old Testament. Can you think of other faithful witnesses from more recent times who you would wish to include in this pantheon? Who might be urging you on and encouraging you nearer to home?
8. The writer urges us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. In our busy lives, how can we best do this?

Spend some time in prayer, encouraging one another and spurring each other on!