

Service Transcript

17th January 2021

Service Leader: Janet Rhea

Speaker: Mark Reid

Intro

Charles Spurgeon said: Heartless hymns are insults to heaven so lets sing our opening song like we mean it and remind ourselves who it is we have come to worship this morning as we sing: **Oh Lord my God when I in awesome wonder.**

Responsive prayer:

Let us say these words together:

Leader: We have come together today to meet with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

All: We bow before our saviour, thank you for our salvation

Leader: We come to worship together

All: To enthrone our king in our hearts, to put all other things aside, to focus only on Jesus

Leader: Please be in this time Lord and open our hearts

All: That we may hear your voice and be changed because we are here now.

Leader: Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us

All: That we may be renewed, revived and restored as your children.

Let us continue to focus on God as we sing: **Only by Grace**

Reflection:

We live in tricky times. It is easy to be demoralised and down hearted. Yet God always entrusts us with the power to choose. We can choose to be grateful or grumpy, hopeful or hopeless, We can choose instant gratification today... things that give us a short cheer up boost, or God's best for us tomorrow. We can walk by faith or by sight.... We choose.

Julian of Norwich: describes a vision where God showed her a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, lying in the palm of her hand. As she looked at it with her mind's eye she thought, 'What can this be?' And the answer came: 'It is all that is made.'

It seemed so small that it might have disintegrated suddenly into nothingness. But she understood, 'It lasts, and always will, because God loves it; and in the same way everything has its being through the love of God'.

In this little thing she saw three properties: the first is that God made it; the second is that God loves it; the third is that God keeps it. That applies to us too.

When you look up at the night sky you remember who put the stars into space. How His love, His power and His good intentions for you are real.

Charles Surgeon when visiting an orphanage got a basin of water and plunged his hands into it. He asked the children "Now why don't my hands drown?" One little boy said: "Because your head is not in the water"

That is it, our head is Christ, he has risen, He is alive, We are in him. We cannot drown if we are alive in and focused on Him.

Like lamps who refuse to be plugged into the mains, we will feel in darkness unless we focus and rely on our Lord. How rich we are, and yet we can choose worry, stress, fear.

Charles Wesley in the final verse of the Hymn "and can it be" describes it like this:

Jesus and all in Him is mine, Alive in Him my living head

Psalm 27:13 says: Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness while I am here in the land of the living. Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes wait patiently for the Lord.

Let's sing that great hymn together as it reminds us so much of God love for us and our assurances in Him....

Intro to theme of fellowship:

Love is crucial in a church. There is not one of the 21 letters or epistles of the new testament written to the early church that does not speak of the relationships between Christians. For example Romans deals with the relationships between those strong and those weak in faith. The book of Philemon is written to a slave owner reminding him that his Christianity affects his relationship with his slave now. Which ever book it is, each one talks about relationships because the biggest destructive force in churches is disunity. And over it all is the love we should have for each other.

So when we come to think of fellowship which is our subject this morning we are reminded of Moses who could not pray on the mountain about the battle being fought below alone. He needed fellowship support and when he got weary his helpers Aaron and Hur, got him a seat and held his arms up for him. This is a lovely picture of love and fellowship in the church. We see a brother or sister isolated, struggling, needing support and we provide it out of the love we have for them. We all need this when we get weary; others need to uphold us. Ecc 4.12 says:

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken. One of the ways we can support others even in a lockdown is to pray for them.

Corrie Ten Boom said: Any concern too small to be turned into a prayer is too small to be turned into a burden. Isn't that true. We often turn things over and over in our minds and yet fail to commit to prayer about them. Let us bring our prayers before God this morning, we will use the interlude to pray for those we know and then we will close the prayer together with spoken words at the end.

We come to a time of prayer..... Interlude: 3 mins

Please say these words with me:

Father we thank you that you have heard our cries to you. We ask that you intervene in all of these situations. Lord we ask that you will make us a people of love, of fellowship and of prayer to support each other. Breath on us as a fellowship, pouring out your grace and mercy so that although physically we are apart at the moment we remain united in you

Breathe on me breath of God

Reading: Acts 2:42-47

Sermon: Fellowship – Commitment to Others

In many conversations during the first Lockdown, one of the greatest felt losses of having to take services and activities online, has been that of face to face fellowship. Yes, it's true we have Zoom, which some have found helpful, but others have found difficult. Then there was the return to live services, which some found a lifeline and others found difficult with limited personal interaction and without the same atmosphere as before. And of course there were those without any internet access who have found Lockdown very difficult.

If we didn't know it already, a foundational principle of the church is that it's a fellowship; that's what church, *ekklesia*, is – a meeting, an assembly, a group of people gathering with common purpose.

In our new series on characteristics of the very early church, we find fellowship was key . Let me remind you again what the church committed themselves to.

COMMITTED TO WORSHIP

COMMITTED TO FELLOWSHIP

COMMITTED TO DISCIPLESHIP

COMMITTED TO SERVICE

COMMITTED TO SHARING

We saw last week how the church prioritised worship as we looked at VERSE 42
42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

This is what they *devoted* themselves to, it was their passion, their priority. These were important. You see amongst that list of four items, that there is one different from the rest and that's fellowship. Their worship was about engaging with one another, as well as engaging with God.

That's why I said last week that even though I encourage a personal time of worship and devotion, particularly at this time of pandemic, it cannot replace corporate worship. Without one another, the church, at any scale cannot grow and thrive. We as individuals won't grow and thrive either. As I was preparing this week I was also working on stuff for Unity Week and found that the strapline for Churches Together in Britain and Ireland is this: CTBI – more together, less apart. That applies so just as much in a local church context as it does in national scale Christian engagement. We can be so much more and do so much more when doing it with others, rather than acting alone.

Why is fellowship so *essential* to the health of the church?

The Greek word for fellowship is one you may have heard of before: *KOINONIA*: common, having in common, sharing. It's a common word in the NT. VERSE When Paul in 1 Cor 10 says "*The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*" he uses the word *koinonia*. It's a sharing in the body - we all participate, share, in it. This is the idea in Acts 2:42. The fellowship was sharing. Their worship was a shared experience. They shared their lives together too. This is amplified in VERSES 44-45 *All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.* The word "common" in verse 44 is *koina* has the same root as "fellowship" (*koinonia*) in verse 42.

The early Church had an emphasis on sharing with one another and apart from what we already said, they were people who hung out with one another: VERSE 46 *Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.* It was a positive relationship

Once we start looking through the rest of the New Testament we find various pictures to describe the church which reinforce the essential nature of fellowship.

In EPHESIANS 2:19-22 The church is described in this way *19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.* We are a building, a holy temple. Each brick, each beam, each tile goes to make up the complete structure. What God purposes for us as the people of God is with one another, not alone. Notice how Christ is the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets are the foundations – all harking back to Acts 2:42 to the apostles' teaching.

There's a second picture in these verses - actually, it's two. We are part of a holy nation, we are part of the household of God. We are members of God's family. And we're not irrelevant either. God is our Father, and our Brother is Jesus. There's some pretty hefty theology there, but I give you this. If Jesus is our Brother, then we afford Him the respect He deserves. If we do that for one sibling, we need to show as much respect to our fellow siblings – our other brothers and sisters in Christ. God church is built on love and respect, which is what those early disciples practised.

Finally, there is the best known picture of all. We are part of the body of Christ. 1 COR 12:12-14 *12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.*

Another hefty set of verses here that pictures the Church as a body. Notice how we have been made part of it. Being part of the Church is not a lifestyle choice, but what we have been placed in by God. Jesus is the head, we are the body and that chapter goes on to say that even though we are all diverse, we all have a part to play and none is dispensable. We

can't function without our head – Christ – but we can't function properly without the other bits of the body.

Church is about fellowship, sharing, inter-dependence. Church is not an earthly organisation, however much we as human beings try to make it – it's a God given, God appointed, God purposed body, living temple, family, nation and whatever.

To grow, to thrive we have a need to be interdependent. More together, less apart – the cord with three strands.

And as time went on we discover that once the church was over the early high, it found itself going through choppy times when these relationships were proved and they bore one-another's burdens. Their relationships were genuine, but we don't go far into the Acts and then the Epistles to find that churches became places of disagreement, sin, gossip, conflict and finally schism. Why? Because they forgot the meaning and importance of *koinonia* and things started to go wrong and the end point was churches fell apart.

Last week I underlined the importance of worship. But as we have seen worship in VERSE 42 and seen the word fellowship there. Proper worship isn't just about our commitment to Christ and our desire to engage with Him, to affirm His worth, but to also affirm those who in the fellowship, those who we share with. And by implication, if we are not affirming them, loving them, sharing our lives with them, worshipping with them, seeking the Lord together, then we're not truly worshipping God.

Hopefully now you can see why fellowship is essential to our faith and why we have missed we have missed one another so. Perhaps we need to have a discussion on how we build up our fellowship post-pandemic because fellowship isn't just doing religious stuff together, but being friends and family in Christ.

That's not to say that Lockdown didn't foster fellowship or was a barrier to developing and maintaining fellowship. Using the phone, or Whatsapp or Zoom has a different dynamic to face to face but I know of those in the Fellowship who have built new friendships and strengthened others in the past 10 months. How can we build on this as we go forward. On the positive side – used whatever we could to maintain some of those friendship, and develop new ones. How can we build up those relationships as we go forward?

So as I close, the challenge of today is the same as last week. If we had a negative experience of church before Lockdown, it's time to look again and see what God wants from each of us. If we took fellowship lightly and have not been involved with the church as we should have; then now is the time to reflect on that start afresh as we slowly come out of Lockdown and again ask ourselves the question "what sort of church should we be?"

Let's pray shall we?

Father, we often don't realise the importance of something until it is taken away from us. In these past months, most of us have had little face to face fellowship with one another and we admit how much we have missed it in worship, in serving You together and in the friendships we have socially. As we start to consider how we should move forward as we

come out of Lockdown, help us to affirm one another afresh, to do those things that will build up the common good and unity in the church, that we may be built up in our relationship with you and follow you more nearly in our obedience to You.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen

One of the things that has always concerned me about many modern songs has been the preponderance of the words "I" and "me" rather than "us" or "we", especially in the light of what we have thought about today. Here is an older song about the way God is building us up has His people together For I'm building a people of power.

FOR I'M BUILDING A PEOPLE OF POWER.

That's almost it for today. Don't forget about the Unity Week activities this week. Here are some words of blessing.

Now to Him who can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, according to His power that is with in us; to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What aspect of fellowship have you missed most during the pandemic and lockdown.
2. Read Acts 2:42-47. What sorts of things did the disciples do together? How did those things build their faith? How can we apply them to our situation?
3. In what ways should we build ourselves up as a church fellowship in the post-covid world? What things should we try to concentrate on? What new things learned should we continue to do?