

**Notes from an ABC Church Awayday at Egerton Village Hall,
Saturday 28th May with Jonathan Jankowski**

Session 1: God's Purpose for the Church

Have you ever rediscovered something? Jonathan has been rediscovering his gift for drawing while on holiday, and it's been really great. After the pandemic **we need to rediscover the Church!** Jonathan loves the Church. It's great that we had the technology to share online over the lockdown, but Church online is not true Church – the gathered people, the body – we need to be together (*where possible*).

We can think of church as an institution, can think we don't need Church, but we do. We can feel let down and disappointed.

But **we can't afford to treat the church as secondary when God sees it as primary.**

We need to rediscover God's vision of the Church. There's a danger we reduce it to a building, but it's us, you and me. And **the Church is central to God's purposes**. **Matthew 16:18** '*...on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*' The Church is the radiant, spotless bride of Christ.

Ephesians 3:1-13:

'For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles - Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

In Ephesians 3 the first 3 chapters are all about theology, and the 2nd 3 chapters are more practical. **For God the Church is the most important thing on planet Earth. It is God's Plan A for a lost and broken world.**

Ekklesia – a gathering. In the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) it is used for the gatherings of God's people. God's people are called out to fulfil the purposes of God in our world.

Wherever I am I am part of the body of the Church (the worldwide body of God's people). We are chosen in Christ before Creation. God had a plan for you. It's mysterious, wonderful, the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the gospel. God took hold of Paul and gave him understanding of the gospel. It's about **reconciling man to God, but also man to man.** Paul is in prison because his whole life is devoted to planting Churches. He has been saved by the grace of God and called to proclaim the unsearchable riches of the gospel. Paul is a Hebrew of Hebrews, he has sat under the best rabbis. But then he met Christ and realised what God was doing in bringing together Jews and Gentiles. **We are all one in Christ. There should be no prejudice or division among us.**

Jonathan has been attending a conference on **the need to plant Churches.** The Assemblies of God are planning to plant 400 Churches across the country in the next few years.

God's eternal purpose – the church – the gathered community of God's people. This was God's intention, v10, 'His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose that He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

The Church is primary to God, and it needs to be primary to us. Sometimes we can reduce our salvation to my personal experience with Jesus. That's important, but it's not just about that. **In the gospel we are reconciled to God... and each other.** Some are serving God overseas. **We are connected around the world. The Church across the globe is growing.** Often Christians in poor or persecuted places understand what it means to be the gathered people of God, **a new community – His redeemed people.** The gospel speaks not only to the earthly realm, but also the heavenly realm. As angels of heaven see the Church they understand God's plan. People are coming to know Jesus.

It's not about our buildings, our programmes, how trendy we are, what our music is like. Some of these things may be important, we need to think about what we have to say to the world around us. But it's about people. Jesus died for people, with all our funny ways, not what kind of songs we sing. What unites us is Jesus, the head of the body.

‘His purpose was that through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.’ Manifold – like the colours in a bunch of flowers, or a rainbow, variety, colour, beauty. What God is building is something beautiful. **It’s all about community. We need one another.** This understanding of Church is central to Christian living. **Faith in Jesus brings us together.** More and more people, finding salvation, prayer, love, acceptance in Jesus. This **such a high calling**. It’s what Church is meant to be.

Where will people find something better? **Everything else in our world eventually fails. The Church points to a new creation.** In **Revelation 5:9** we see people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation declaring God’s praises.

There is **no Plan B**. We have **a responsibility to be God’s people in the world where we live.**

So we need to rediscover Church. Wow! It is eternal, historic, fundamental, a living representation of what Christ has done.

In conclusion **Ephesians 3:14**: *‘For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.’

To think about:-

Consider one or all of the following verses: **Matt 16:18, Eph 5:25-27, 1 Tim 3:15, 1 Peter 2:4-5**

What do they teach us about God’s purpose for the Church?

How do we maintain a view of the Church that is in keeping with God’s purposes?

Session 2) Our Responsibility in the Church

Ephesians 4:1-16:- *‘As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:

*“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”*

(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe). So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

In this session I want to look at **our responsibility**. **What does it mean for us to be part of Christ’s body?** The main thing is that we declare and proclaim that Jesus is Saviour and Lord. Never look down on another Church because they do things differently to us.

Within the life of a local Church we all have a part to play. It’s not all about the leaders. **We are all needed.**

Again, in the first 3 chapters of Ephesians we see the theology of grace. None of it is of ourselves, its all of Him. And now, in the second three chapters we see **the practical implications**. **What does it mean to me? How do I live it out in my context?**

If we have been in Church for any length of time we will have seen some stuff. As a minister’s kid you see some of the worst side of Church. But **Cynicism kills**. **‘Lord, help me to have a good heart, a good attitude.’**

Our responsibility. The Importance of Church Unity. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

1) Our responsibility starts with an understanding of **the character we ought to have** – ‘a life worthy of the calling you have received’. **V2** ‘Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.’

Have a high view of the Church. **We have a high calling.** It’s great to come to faith in Christ, but it does bring a responsibility, to live a life worthy of our calling. We are born again – the miracle of conversion. At Family Trust we are talking in schools about Pentecost. Jonathan had the privilege of talking to a young girl about baptism. She had been christened, but said when she was older she might think about being baptised again because she wanted to follow Jesus. Baptism symbolises that we put to death our old life and old attitudes and are raised to new life in Christ. **There should be something about our lives that looks different.**

‘Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another.’ Often we expect something from church, but our calling is to **think about what we will bring to Church.** (a) **Humility** is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. (b) **Gentle** – God is a gentleman. He never forces us. God is good, everything He does comes from a place of goodness. Gentleness – **strength under control**, like a wild stallion trained. (c) We need **patience** with one another. We’re all a bit funny when we really think about it. None of us have got it all sussed out. (d) **Bearing with one another in love.** These are **four things that would change our Church life.** We don’t necessarily possess these things in our fallen nature. Without God’s grace and mercy, none of us would be here.

2) ‘Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. There is one body and one Spirit... one Lord one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.’ We are Trinitarians, we believe in Three in One, Father, Son and Spirit. Paul reminds us of where our faith is – the unity within the godhead.

The unity of the godhead is indestructible and for Paul the Church is likewise. This is a **lofty vision.** Despite the disunity we see, his vision is of something very high. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. Church history is littered with disunity, but God sees one Church, spiritual unity that transcends our distinctions. **If we understand the unity of the godhead, then we must make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.** This requires our all, humility, love, patience. We shouldn’t let a cigarette paper come between us. Remember the old song:- ‘**Bind Us Together, Lord, Bind Us Together With Cords That Cannot Be Broken... There Is Only One Body, That Is Why We Sing.**’ It requires our effort. We are all recipients of God’s unmerited grace.

3) In this unity, there’s diversity. **V7** ‘to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.’ **Our unity is expressed in our diversity.**

Be thankful we are not all clones. **We all have different gifts to serve**, gifts given to us by Christ. *'He... gave gifts to His people.'* We have become His captives – we are captivated by Jesus, and He has given us gifts. His name is far above all. Jesus sits at the right hand of His Father, and bestows gifts on His people.

Pastors and teachers are given to equip and build up others. **Never put Church leaders on a pedestal. We are all weak, we all fail. But leaders are called to equip God's people for service.** *'Lord, help me understand how I can help.'* **God has ordained us to do good works.**

4) **Have a commitment to growth.** Growing into the fullness of Christ. The New Testament gives a constant call to grow. As we are released into service, it helps us to grow, *'so that we will in all things grow up into Him.'* **If a local congregation of God's people is functioning well, people will be serving and growing.** Speaking the truth in love is not your excuse to have a go at someone. It is part of growing together. We are all connected. **God's purpose is for us to grow as we are connected. Christ is the Head. He is building our Church.**

So let's rediscover the Church. We need to have a high view of what God is doing in the Church. **Rediscover the wonder and the glory of the Church. God's new society, declaring the praises of God.** It is not boring (as one survey said), but **the most precious thing we can do and be part of.**

To think about:-

Ephesians 2:10 reminds us that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do. It's a reminder that we have each received *'grace gifts'* and that we all have a part to play in the life of the church.

Consider your SHAPE

S = Spiritual gifts

H = Heart: what stirs your emotions? What issues grab your attention?

A = Abilities: what talents do you have?

P = Personality: what kind of person are you? Caring, Generous, Methodical, Consistent, Loyal, etc.

E = Experience: what are the things that life has shown you, what experiences have you had that might help others.

How might you use your SHAPE to serve the Church?