

## CCH Sermon on “the Church”#2 Growing the Church 23FEB25

**Matt 28:19** “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

- We’ve thought about “Being the church” but this morning we are thinking about “Growing the Church”, in other words making more disciples for Jesus.
  - What we sometimes call evangelism.
    - Very appropriate for our church as we look outwards to a town that so needs Jesus.
- But we come at it from a surprising angle.
  - We come at it from Jesus’ so called “high priestly prayer” in John 17.
- This chapter is an incredible chapter.
  - It’s like no other prayer recorded in the gospels.
    - You really get the sense of walking on holy ground.
    - Oliver Cromwell’s chaplain Thomas Manton preached 45 sermons on this chapter,
      - we’ll just do one this time (!), and we’ll only cover 4 verses.
- Context: You can see from the headings that (on the night before Jesus died)...
  - **V1-5** Jesus has already prayed for himself and for his Father to be glorified (we are just about to head to the cross)
  - **V6-19** Jesus prays for his immediate disciples, the apostles, and for their protection in the truth.
  - But now **v20-26** he turns to praying for Christ Church Huntingdon.
- “Hang on” you say, don’t be silly, Jesus lived 2000 years ago, CCH was started 7 years ago.
  - Yes but look carefully at **v20**.
    - Jesus is praying for subsequent generations of believers who will trust in the gospel.
      - That’s pretty amazing.
      - But the big point is clear. **Jesus prays for us to be one.**
    - And he’s praying that we would be one.
    - **That we would be absolutely one in mission and purpose**
      - **united in our love for one another and for God.**

Let’s look at 3 things about this unity today.

### **1) A UNITY IN THE TRUTH (v20-21a)**

- There are a lot of different flavours of Christians in the world,
  - lots of different denominations,
  - sadly quite a lot of splits.

- We ourselves left the Church of England last year because we didn't feel able to partner with the Bishop of Ely in mission in the light of his support for same sex blessings.
- Is Jesus calling for all Christians everywhere to abandon all our differences and partner together no matter what we believe?
- No. This is not a watered down lowest common denominator unity at all costs.
  - Look carefully at v20.
    - This is a unity in the truth.
    - This is always the way in the New Testament.
- Jesus is praying for those who come to know him through their message, the apostles.
  - There can be no true unity if we ignore what the apostles said, because there can be no true Christianity if we ignore what the apostles said.
- That is the tragedy at the moment, and one reason why many churches are going off the rails, because they are abandoning the teaching of God's prophets and apostles in the Scriptures.
  - When culture says one thing and the Bible says another, they go with culture.
  - We saw in the first talk that the building of the church will grow dangerously wonky if it's not built on the truth.
  - And it's so easy to do, and we need to constantly praying for the work of the Holy Spirit to help us base all that we do on the Bible.
- We won't expect absolute unanimity between Christians before we can love one another and work together.
  - There's a difference between unity and unanimity
  - There are always going to be small differences between Bible believing Christians,
  - and we need to be generous and unite together on the fundamentals of the faith,
- As one phrase with a long pedigree in the Christian church puts it like this...
  - **In essentials unity**
  - **In non-essentials liberty**
    - **In all things charity**
- ☞ **However the application here is that take the Bible seriously.**
  - We've seen that last week and week and we'll see it again in the final sermon, so I won't labour it.
    - But if we are going to be united, it starts by getting our Bibles open.
    - There's nothing like taking Bible truth and
      - Thinking about it together
      - Applying it together

- Singing about it together
- Growing together in Bible understanding
- It bonds us together, as we put small differences aside and focus on the person we have in common- Jesus Christ who died for us.
- Ephesians 4:11-13. *“Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up<sup>12</sup> 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.”*

OK we’re going to go a little bit deeper now, so check your neighbour is awake, and take a deep breath because we are going to look at some mindblowing Trinitarian theology.

**It isn’t necessarily complicated but it is stretching and it is amazing!**

- So far, we’ve seen that Jesus calls us to unity as a church,
  - And that unity comes from believing the message of the apostles, ie the Bible.

**THE NEXT THING ABOUT THIS UNITY IS THAT IT IS...**

## **2) A UNITY LIKE WITH AND FROM OUR GOD! (v21b-23)**

- Don’t panic, just work with me through these verses.
- V20-21 “that all of them may be one Father, JUST AS YOU ARE IN ME AND I AM IN YOU”.
- God isn’t a solo being, in fact he is a union of three persons in one, a Trinity.
  - God the Father,
  - God the Son (Jesus),
  - God the Holy Spirit.
- And those three persons (which together we call the Godhead) are totally united in their purpose, to glorify one another and save humanity.
- Look closely at V21 Jesus says “just as you are in me”
- The Father is in the Son.
  - That’s to say that you can see the Father working through Jesus because whatever the Father does, Jesus does, perfectly reflecting him.
- BuT ALSO 21 Jesus “and I am in you”.... the Son is in the Father
  - That is to say that he is totally dependent on his Father and doing exactly what he asks him to do.
- We could say similar things about the Spirit too.
- But do you see the logic of the verse.

- Jesus is calling Christians to mirror the Father and Son in oneness
- WOW!
  - That is a high calling.
- We are to be one like the Father and Son are one!
  - How on earth are we ever going to manage that!?
  - When you look at the people in your lifegroup, or if you are married, your spouse, how are you going to be united LIKE GOD?
    - We are a pretty diverse lot with an increasing number of backgrounds in our church.
- Well this is not something that we muster up ourselves. Look at the next bit.
- *“May they also be in us” v21*
- It’s a unity LIKE God, but it’s a **Unity WITH God.**
- When someone puts their trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes into their lives. They are united to Jesus and through him they are united to the Father.
- When I got married to Emma we shared everything.
  - Her CD collection.
  - My marmite jars.
  - All of our books.
- When you turn to Jesus, he shares himself with us!
- So that all the help that we need comes **FROM** him.
  - And that’s the third part of this.
    - It’s unity LIKE GOD (because we are to reflect the unity and love between F & S)
    - It’s a unity WITH GOD (because we are “in them”)
    - But it’s a unity FROM GOD because of v22.
  - V22
- **WOW!** Jesus gives us the glory that he was given.

- What is that glory?
  - Well glory in John's gospel gets to the heart of who God is, his beauty his brilliance, his wonder, his weightiness and majesty.
  - But it's most clearly seen at the cross. (v1)
  - **So Jesus wants his church to share his glory- his very beauty and majesty but it is going to mean we walk the humble route of humility and sacrifice in order to come together at the Cross.**
- This takes a bit of getting your head around. A unity like God, with God, from God. But at the very least note that this means that unity is possible, because it's a gift from God.
  - It means that a bunch of sinners from all sorts of different backgrounds CAN be truly united
    - ▲ Not being into football, I constantly marvel at how people who are complete strangers from other sides of the country when they discover they support the same football team are best mates!
    - They are one in their support for Crystal Palace. Just by being supporters of the same team there's a kind of bond that transcends all other barriers.
    - Well we are more deeply united than any sport fans.
- Unity is not something that we manufacture.
  - It is something given.
  - But that doesn't mean that we just let go and let God.
  - Is it God's job or our job to be united?
    - Answer yes!
- There's a similar idea in Ephesians 4:3 where Paul tells the Ephesian church to *"Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"*.
  - Our unity comes from the Holy Spirit.
  - It's a gift.
    - The cross forgives the sins that separate us from God
    - And from one another
      - SO we are ONE!
  - But we do need to work at it.

- **So the lesson is to take unity seriously**
  
- I wonder if you have ever fallen out with someone at church?
  - If it hasn't happened yet, sadly it may do one day.
  - Someone lets you down.
    - They say something behind your back and you find out.
    - Someone on your team doesn't pull their weight
    - Something happens in life and no-one was there for you
  - And the bitterness starts to grow
    - You don't really want to come back to church.
    - There are people that you don't really want to see.
  
- Well don't let it fester. That's what the world does.
  - Because the World doesn't have any resources to throw at a broken relationship except further fuel for the fire of anger and revenge.
  - But we have the powerful work of Christ on the cross
  - We have the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts
    - So let's put wrongs right and make every effort.

Over the Summer I read Tim Keller's excellent book "forgive- why should I and how can<sup>1</sup>". And he makes the point that we don't forgive because what the person did doesn't matter or didn't hurt. But (drawing on the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matt 18) we forgive because we have been forgiven a far greater debt by Jesus.

- **So keep unity in the church central.**
  - **If you have let someone down, go and say sorry.**
  - **If you have been hurt by someone, go and talk to them.**
  - **Together come back to the cross and find and offer forgiveness.**
  - **Start today as we **share** communion together**
  - **"Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace".**

**But where is Jesus' prayer going with this unity?**

**Let me re-read our paragraph and see if you can spot it- it's there twice.**

**John 17:20-23.**

This is an incredibly powerful part of John's gospel, and a truth which is undervalued in the church today.

Jesus is praying that we will be one so that v21 the world may believe that the Father has sent him.

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Keller, "Forgive- why I should and how can I?" Hodder and Stoughton [here](#).

### So it's **3) AN OUTWARD FOCUSED UNITY**

- It's easy to miss those. Let's look at them again.
  - V21b. SO THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE THAT YOU HAVE SENT ME.
  - V23b. THEN THE WORLD WILL KNOW THAT YOU SENT ME AND HAVE LOVED THEM EVEN AS YOU HAVE LOVED ME.
- Do you see what it's saying. The unity between Christians is to be a window onto God.
  - In some miraculous way, unbelievers (that's who's meant by "the world") are going to look at our oneness and like mindedness and draw a conclusion about Jesus from it.
- It's very similar to what Jesus says in John 13:35. He gives his disciples a new commandment, that they should love one another. *"As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another"*.
- How does that work?
  - Is this evangelism without words?
  - No I don't think so because, this prayer has emphasised again and again the need for the Truth.
- But instead the Holy Spirit is making the unity and love between Christians a window onto the relationships within God.
  - We can't see God and his unity.
  - But we can see humans and their unity.
- Perhaps some of you had this experience.
  - You didn't grow up in a Christian home.
  - But you met a bunch of Christians.
  - And although they were quirky, possibly with their own sub culture
  - Nevertheless there was something about them.
    - A kindness, an interest in you,
    - A quality of relationships. (meals for ppl sick./baby)
    - A sense of peace.
    - It's hard to describe.
    - But it was like nothing you'd ever seen elsewhere.
- You couldn't explain it in terms of Trinitarian theology
  - But you experienced something tangible.
  - And you wanted to know more about what they believe.
  - You wanted to be with these people.
- Well the **love** (ch13) and the **unity** (ch17) of Christians was opening a window onto God, so that you thought to yourself,
  - "Maybe there is something in this"!

- Do you see where we've come?
  - Helpfully the 3 pictures from our logo
    - If we are to be a church that reaches out with the good news to Huntingdon and the surrounding areas (BRIDGE)
    - We are going to be a church that takes our relationships with each other really seriously (PEOPLE).
    - But to do that, we don't look to one another, or to our own strength, we look to God, and to the unity that we have with him, and that comes from the gospel of Jesus in the BIBLE (CROSS).
  
- 3 concluding practicalities to make it really concrete, which I'd like you to think about in lifegroups this week, or perhaps over coffee as we think about CORPORATE EVANGELISM...
  
- **1) make the most of Sundays (1 Cor 14:25)**
  - If our personal oneness in the cross by the Spirit points people to Jesus, then we should make the most of Sundays.
  - Here is a primary place where the oneness of Christians is on show
  - (in our interactions, in our message, in our singing, 120 people from different backgrounds, living in harmony).
  
  - You may turn up on a Sunday in consumer mode, hoping that
    - the preacher has a few interesting stories to keep you awake,
    - or that the songs are from your preferred decade of choice,
    - or that the coffee is good and the biscuits are gluten free.
  
  - But remember who we are! God's bride the church coming together.
    - This is a holy moment in the week
    - We are gathered together with one another
    - With our amazing God who is with us.
  
  - Of course for some families, a child will need the loo just before you need to jump in the car.
    - But for most of us, could we set out a bit early?
    - Could we come a few minutes early to check if there are new people to talk to, or if the refreshments team need an extra pair of hands.
    - Could we invite a friend along to church?
  
  - And could we stay a little longer in the chairs to get to know someone around us, hearing if there's some way you could serve them.
    - And as we do all this, the unbelievers who pop in every week say
      - "There's something different about these people".
  
- There's an amazing verse in 1 Cor 14:24-25 where Paul says this:
  - *"But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, <sup>25</sup> as the*



*secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"*

- **2) do evangelism as a team-**

- I believe that God calls all of us to be little e- evangelists.
  - We are to gossip the gospel, sharing what we can about Jesus as we pray for opportunities
  - That is scary, and we need to be bold in loving people so much that we don't care
  - But it's easier when we do it together.
- Think of the women's craft event at Christmas.
  - Some people bought the food
  - Others brought their families.
  - Jean shared some Christmas good news.
  - People gathered round tables working on a Christmas craft together – all ages coming
  - AND people brought friends to enjoy that relationship and chat.
- Perhaps in lifegroups you can think about something you can do as a lifegroup to mix believers and unbelievers together.
- Share ideas with Alice and Becca who are taking a lead on this.

- **3) Work on gospel culture.**

- If unity commends the gospel then disunity dishonours Christ.
  - We can actually undo our Christian message
    - By unchristian actions.
- Ray Ortlund is a US pastor who has a podcast with British evangelist, Sam Allberry called "you are not Crazy". (It's on the dig deeper)
  - And their whole first season was about it they talk about how a church needs to have BOTH
    - Gospel doctrine (in other words good teaching)
    - AND gospel culture (in other words good relationships)
- Ray Ortlund often quotes the founder of the L'Abri movement, Francis Schaeffer who said this, and I'll end with this challenging quote... *"If we do not show beauty in the way that we treat each other, then in the eyes of the world, and in the eyes of our own children we are destroying the truth we proclaim".*

**Let's pray.**