

"Vision And Values: Life with each other" - Steve Dunn 25/09/11

Whether you're Christian or not, we can all see the failings of our current society: an increasing "every man for himself" syndrome, serious financial issues, the lonely, and so on. The significant proven link? Loss of community.

There's no doubt that as we've "progressed" technologically, politically, economically, local community has suffered. COMMUNITY provides raised moral standards, consistent care, a sense of belonging, and economic benefits. God knows this. Which is why He insists on His people demonstrating the true essence of COMMUNITY to the world.

We can look at the church in the same way Edward Longshanks looks at Scotland in the film Braveheart: "*The trouble with Scotland... is it's full of Scots.*" Yes, the "trouble" with the church can be that it's full of people - flawed, selfish, weak, insecure, arrogant... just like you and me! And they're being transformed by the outworking of His Holy Spirit. God's point of view is that the GREAT thing about church is it IS made up of people - His children.

How do we work this out practically? Look at [PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30](#)

This is a church in a very diverse society, struggling with opposition and suffering, but also division: two women aren't getting on together [4.2] and it seems people were taking sides.

v30: "struggle" = "ANXIETY" [Col2.1], both inside and out. We'll all face it, which is all the more argument against individualistic Christianity. You won't grow/flourish alone. It's sometimes unavoidable (prison/illness), but to voluntarily place yourself in that position is unbiblical, foolish, immature and dangerous.

"We can't pick up the Bible and obey its will for our lives without belonging to a community of people who are doing the same thing." (Keller)

So: how do we stand firm in one Spirit/strive together? Personally, for us as Beacon Church we relate like this:

- The NewFrontiers worldwide family of churches
- Our Sphere within that ("Relational Mission") - apostolic, resourcing, planting
- Our East Kent Cluster of churches within that sphere - supporting, encouraging
- Our own expression of the local church - BEACON!
- Our small groups (Cell) - Jesus had His 1000's, 72, 12, 3, 1 = discipleship
- HOSPITALITY under-girds all this - encourages deeper community.

Diversity is a major theme of the Bible's big story ("*Every tribe, language, people, nation*" Rev.5.9). Christ never intended us to be an exclusive people. The true beauty of genuine community is only revealed when it goes against the grain and develops between a diverse group(s) of people. If that wasn't the case, Paul would not be writing this message!

Is this achievable? Yes. How? "*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ...*" Look at [PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11](#)

Genuine, caring community IS achievable when founded, not on rules/regulations or Equality and Diversity policies (as valid as those are), but on the cornerstone of Christ's sacrifice.

"*Humility is not thinking less of yourself but of yourself less*". Jesus, still being God, didn't pretend He wasn't such, but still put *us* first. Why? So us flawed human beings could be rescued from the consequences of that selfishness.

"Equality and Diversity" won't work totally in our own strength. We're all affected by sin. But the cross levels the playing field: sex, race, social standing, interests, pasts... we're ALL sinners saved by a gracious God through the cross. If you have trouble accepting people and their faults, remember He accepts you despite yours.

Now read [PHILIPPIANS 2:12-16a](#)

"Therefore... work out your salvation with *fear and trembling** = not that the salvation available through Christ's death and resurrection is incomplete, but that it bears the best fruit when we work it out in our daily lives.

Then we will "*shine like stars in the universe*". Paul is saying "As you hold tight to HIS Word, putting aside the myriad of reasons not to, then you'll shine in the surrounding darkness, TOGETHER." A beautiful constellation!

Spurgeon: "*Christian labours, disconnected from the church, are like sowing seed and reaping without having a barn in which to store the harvest.*"

When we see genuine community breaking out more and more in the church and into the neighbourhood around us, we WILL see the lonely cared for, the poor supported, the excluded included, orphans and widows finding family... BUT IT REQUIRES COMMITMENT.

Do you know Christ as your Lord and Saviour? Do you sense that need for belonging but don't know how to meet it? Or do the church's imperfections put you off? Jesus thinks she's brilliant. He gave everything for her. And the only way to know TRUE belonging and acceptance is by entering in too.

LIFE WITH EACH OTHER. It's hard, it's scary, it means commitment, it means biting your tongue, it sometimes means taking a deep breath and counting to 10, it means sacrifice. But you know what? Christ went through all of that for you so you can pass it on... He set his face like flint, He bit His tongue, He gave Himself sacrificially, putting *us* before Himself.... What better way to glorify Him than by doing the same?

Cell Q's:

1. What is your natural reaction when you meet someone unlike you? Why is that?
2. What can we learn from other non-Western cultures about community? Anything practical we could adopt?
3. Discuss how having a deeper understanding of what Christ has done for us blossoms our community rather than us simply "doing what we should do".
4. For a suggested WITNESS section: Plan an event or regular practice that bears the hallmarks of all we've discussed this week.