

Group Notes 21 November 2010

Unity

Welcome - Ice Breaker

Before she died Claire Rayner, the Agony Aunt, was asked if she wanted to say anything memorable. Her words were "Tell David Cameron that if he ruins my beloved NHS I shall come and "blankety" haunt him."

Do you know other "famous last words"? What would you like yours to be?

Word - Sermon Summary: Read John 17:20-26

These seven verses are Jesus talking to his nearest and dearest, his heavenly Father, about what he desires for his followers for generations to come. He prayed for **us** just before his agonising and shameful death, which he can see with the eyes of his Father as the start of his glory.

- The key words, repeated several times, are "one", "glory", "love", "know/known" and "in".
- And the pivotal word is "unity". Jesus' dearest wish before He died was that we should be one.

Unity does not mean we will all agree on everything. There will be many opinions, just as there are many notes in a musical chord, but we must agree on one thing, to live and work TOGETHER for God. So our outward expression of unity will reflect our inward unity of purpose.

When the Chilean miners were trapped underground for 69 days, one man, Jose Enriquez brought unity, peace and calm with renewed faith by holding twice daily prayer and bible reading sessions. Here are some quotes:

- He brought calm, God and unity to the most difficult moments
- He was the key man who kept us together through all those days
- He was the unifying element

The times of prayer and Bible reading were the most special moment for the miners, because it was the only moment that they all came together. They came together in the moment of unity. Jose Enriquez said "the Holy Spirit was there. He was ministering to us. He was reconciling us. He was healing us."

Unity in St Matthew's: "The family that prays together stays together" - how much more for the Church! We have over 40 groups working in St Matthew's all, we hope, for the glory of God and most, but not all, of these groups now have a committed "prayer partner". We have six different styles of services on Sundays and Children's Church, a midweek Communion, morning prayer, and other praying groups. God loves and honours all these, which answer our differing needs and hungers for being in the presence of our living Lord. Do we also honour all of them?

Do we think of ourselves as being part of the body of Christ at St Matthew's, or do we call ourselves 8o'clock, 10o'clock, Asian fellowship, Church Hill praise? Is ours the best service or do we genuinely thank God that in our unity we can celebrate the diversity of our styles of worship?

We can try to be united with parties, coffee mornings, barn dances, (all good things and fun), but as the Chilean miners discovered in those black days, real unity, love, glory and knowledge of God's loving, reconciling and healing power only come when He is in the midst of us, He in us and we in him, as Jesus prayed. It is Jesus present in each one of us by His Spirit who makes us all one.

Word 2 - Discussion Questions:-

- Do you recall your thoughts and feelings about the rescue of the Chilean miners? Did you know about the influence prayer and reading the Bible had on them through the leadership of Jose Enriquez? What do you make of it?
- Psalm 133 says that God promises to bless us when we live together in unity. Have you experienced this blessing? Can you describe what it means to you?
- Do you feel as if you are part of St Matthew's as a whole? Or do you feel that you really belong to one or other of the communities and groups which happens to meet at St Matthew's?
- What single step would do most to promote Christian unity:-
 - Nationally?
 - Locally?
 - At St Matthew's?

Please see set out below what the Mission Action Plan says about unity. Could you have a general discussion about this part of the plan?

Mission Action Plan section 3: Unity

- background:
 - *St Matthew's feels like several churches which use the same building rather than one church. The biblical vision for unity is of highly individual parts which are one because they belong to a greater whole.*
- aims:
 - *to strengthen a common sense of identity at St Matthew's*
 - *to build unity in Christ, not uniformity*
- actions:
 - *combined services - twice a year? - organised by a specialist group*
 - *more social events, weekends away, trips to Spring Harvest, New Wine etc*
 - *broader representation on Church Council etc*
 - *improve communication, encourage a broader range of contributions*

Worship Ideas

"The family that prays together stays together!" Spend time praying for unity, giving thanks to the Lord who has made us one for our brothers and sisters, with whom we are one. Pray in repentance over any disunity that you have identified in your discussions, and pray for any steps you identified for promoting Christian unity.

Works / Witness

Is there any single item for promoting unity that you could take up and put into practice, either individually or as a group?