

Life in the Spirit Some thoughts

Following our days of prayer in Lent and then at the New Wine summer conference I sensed a growing conviction that we as a church should seek more of God's Spirit. For many years my heart has gone out to the land in which we live and in particular its need of God. The fact that during my Christian years the nation has moved further from God rather than towards Him has been distressing and questions the efficacy of the Church in its efforts to truly represent the body of Christ.

I have sensed for a long time that churches in this country have tended to operate primarily through human initiative and strategy. When I set out therefore on 'Life in the Spirit' it was with the thought that we needed to access more of the Spirit's supernatural power in order to see our competency improve and our mission initiatives bear fruit. I became more convinced though as 'Life in the Spirit' went on that God has much work to do with us before we can do much towards bearing fruit for him.

Throughout 'Life in the Spirit' both in my preparation and during the evenings themselves I felt a strong sense of the presence of God. At one point whilst praying for the final session I believe that the Holy Spirit gave me a picture that brought me up sharp in the realisation that we are currently wasting much time and energy on ineffective and worthless practices. We think that because they're church practices they must be righteous but I fear that perhaps they're not. I recall the words of the prophets Amos and Isaiah. Both prophets condemn the lives and religious practices of God's people (Amos 5:21-27 & Isaiah 58). Whilst the people of Israel stuck to their religion they did not love God fully and failed to attend to justice and walk alongside the poor and needy. Jesus said similar things of the religious elite of his day. I wonder whether they apply also to the church in Britain today. Israel went into exile and we could well go the same way. Taking into account the lack of both manpower and finance we cannot go on simply providing religion for the few club members that remain. I suspect that the economic situation that we're now facing in the Church as well as in the land is indeed of the Spirit of God.

If we the church, are to be involved in God's transformation of the wider world then we ourselves must be prepared to be transformed first. Whilst it may not be overtly stated, or even realised, the activity of the church is often directed towards making itself a viable and preferably growing religious organisation. In other words the promotion of church itself can very easily become the reason for its existence. I sense though that at St. Thomas' we are being called to consider a very different and more outward way of being. After Christmas we will have a review of our church activities and then assess how we might set out to become an authentic expression of a mission-focussed church. The following words of Jesus are, I believe, relevant for us today.

'I tell you unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds.' (John 12:24).

'For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.' (Matt 16:25).

In 'Life in the Spirit' God was I feel asking us to think about the ways in which we might have to die in order to live a more holy existence and bear fruit in His name.



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