

Call to Worship

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken. (Ps 62:1-2)

Worship in song

Sing hymns and/or worship songs of your choice.

Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 39:1-7

Prayer of confession

Loving Father,

as we gaze on your holiness and sit with you on the mountain tops we see the valleys below.

In the valleys of our fear, disturbing questions trouble us and we are faced by our weaknesses.

In the valleys of defeat our intentions lie unfulfilled and we are faced with our inadequacies.

In the valley of death we lie helpless in the jaws of grief and we are faced with our hopelessness.

In the face of these things, we give ourselves unreservedly to you and let you take authority over our lives for when we are weak, you are strong for when you are with us, we need fear no evil. Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry for ever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19)

Prayer of thanksgiving From Psalm 136

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His love endures forever

Give thanks to the God of gods

His love endures forever

To him alone who does great wonders

His love endures forever

Who by his understanding made the heavens

His love endures forever

Who spreads out the earth upon the waters

His love endures forever

We Are A "SENT" People

To the one who remembered us in our low estate

His love endures forever

and freed us from our enemies

His love endures forever

who gives food to every creature

His love endures forever

Give thanks to the God of heaven.

His love endures forever

Amen.

Holy Communion

Jesus asked us to remember him in the simple act of sharing in bread and wine. As such, Holy Communion looks back with gratitude for the sacrifice Jesus made in taking the blame for all the bad things we think and do that would otherwise make us ineligible for life with God.

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, broke it,

(pick up the bread, hold it aloft and break it in two. Hold out the two pieces.)

and said, 'This is my body broken for you'. Likewise, after supper, Jesus took the cup of wine and said,

(Pick up the wine goblet and hold it aloft)

'This cup of wine is my blood which is poured out for you to take away your sins. Drink this,' said Jesus, 'all of you.'

It was also at this supper that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Holy Communion, therefore, not only looks back, but it commissions us to wash each other's feet, i.e. to serve one another, today. The act of Communion binds us together and commissions us share in Christ's mission of service and sacrificial love.

Finally, Holy Communion is also a foretaste of the Heavenly banquet Christians look forward to when God restores us fully to himself and makes all things new in his new kingdom. Christians are therefore a people of hope.

As such, Holy Communion celebrates three things. It celebrates the past, the present and the future.

(Say a prayer of thanks for the bread and the wine which represents the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed in order to rescue us back to God. Then share the bread and wine together.)

The Bible Reading

- Luke 10:1-24

The Message

In days past, when a circus came into a town, the performers would process through the street to the village common where the big top would be erected. The jugglers would juggle as they processed through town. The clowns would be clowning with the bystanders; the beautiful woman who rode a brace of horses whilst standing on their backs would be handing out fliers. The ring-master and the strong man would be inviting people to role up in order to enjoy the amazing spectacle that would be occurring in their town.

In a very real sense, the members of the circus troupe were ambassadors for the circus. They embodied what people could expect to see and experience. They behaved in the streets of the town, in a way that showed people what to expect when they came to the circus tent.

We, the church, are called to do the same.

In Luke 10:1-24, Jesus sends out his disciples, two by two, into the community with instructions to prefigure the Kingdom of God that is coming – as embodied by Jesus.

Jesus' main topic of preaching was to tell people to get ready because God's kingdom was at hand. He told people what the kingdom was and how to behave to get ready for it. Crucially, he also demonstrated its reality by doing acts of healing.

We now have the mandate to do the same.

In order to equip each of us to do this, God has empowered us by his Holy Spirit, giving each one of us gifts and abilities so that we can engage in effective mission. We read in 1 Cor 12:1-11 that these gifts are given “for the common good.”

Each of us has gifts that we can use together as a church community to be effective in ministry. As Greg OKelly, (past principle of St Ignatius College) used to say: *Each person is a unique package of gifts, never to be repeated.*

Each of us is given a different package of gifts in order to engage in ministry.

One of the reasons the church has been so emasculated in recent history is because it has believed the fiction that it is only the ordained clergy that is gifted and trained for ministry.

At its worse, in the Middle Ages, locals would come to the churches and watch the priests do ‘their thing’ as spectators. At its worst, it was not even requiring a congregation at all. The priests simply prayed on behalf of the people, whether they were there or not. Things got so bad in France in the 17th century that French society was scandalised at the idea that anyone other than nuns and monks had to actually live holy and spiritual lives. Those who suggested otherwise were mockingly called 'the Spirituals'.¹ Similarly, lay people who shared their faith with others in 18th century England were derided as 'Enthusiasts'.

1 A group of Catholic laity, led by Madam Guyon and Miguel de Molinos, believed anyone could live holy and spiritual lives, not just monks and nuns. These were those who came to be known as 'the Spirituals.'

We Are A “SENT” People

The institutional western church had indeed come to a perilous, emasculated, enfeebled, unfaithful position. The people of God, the *laos*, the mighty army of God, chosen by God to represent him and prefigure his kingdom, had simply become relegated to the side-lines as passive observers, bit players at best in the church's mission to the world.

This was, and is, terrible!

This parlous state of affairs was nothing other than a triumph of Satan. No wonder the West largely became lost to Christ! It became like a soccer match. Twenty-two players in desperate need of a rest being watched by fifty-thousand spectators in desperate need of exercise. It was like fighting a war by only sending the generals into battle.

In its quest for status, the clergy emasculated the church and its mission. In its quest for status, it made people dependent of clerics rather than making people independent of them. In its quest for status and control, the church built institutions rather than SWAT teams of people able to rapidly deploy to meet the needs of society with the gospel truth and hope.

God now wants his church back. He wants his church to re-engage with mission. He wants truth, hope and power back into his church. As such, God moved by his Spirit to foster the reformation of Martin Luther, the renewal movement of John Wesley, and the charismatic renewal of the 1960 and 70s.

As a result, some who claimed to be Christians woke up from their sleep and discovered what being a Christian really meant.

It means accepting Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, so that you are equipped by God's Holy Spirit to:

- share the truth about God
- display the reality of God

Whilst there will be specialists particularly gifted for some acts of ministry, such as evangelists and teachers, the main job of Christian leaders is to equip the *laos*, (the laity, literally: the people of God), to do their ministry

Ephesians 4:11-16 is a key passage. It teaches that the role of specialist leaders in the church is not to do the ministry of the church. No. Their role is to prepare the church (the *laos*) to do their ministry. This simple profound truth immediately multiplies the effectiveness of the church by a huge magnitude. If it were just up to church ministers to lead people to faith, it would make almost no impact on society as only those few people who came into contact with a minister would be reached. However, if the minister equipped everyone in the church to make disciples of their friends and family – it would transform a nation.

The role of specialist leaders in the church is therefore to “*prepare God's people for works of service*” so that we become mature, like Christ. (vv.11-13). God's ambition is for us to become like Christ, whilst retaining our unique identity. (Note: Paul speaks of Christ being *fully formed* in you in Galatians 4:19.)

The passage in Ephesians 4 goes on to tell us that we are to remain linked with Jesus so that we grow “*as EACH (of us) does (our) work*” (v.16).

We Are A “SENT” People

This passage teaches two things:

- You will get nowhere unless you remain linked in to Jesus.
- You will only grow *as* each of us does our work. If you are waiting until you are trained enough to do your work – it will never happen. You grow *as* you do your ministry.

What does this mean for me? What does this mean for ministers of the church?

I think it means this:

Ministers showing off their learning, is not equipping the saints for ministry.

Ministers tut-tutting over the moral state of the nation, is not equipping the saints for ministry.

Ministers entertaining people with handy hints on living, is not equipping the saints for ministry.

What does 'equipping God's people for ministry' look like?

It means that I, as a church leader, ask myself these questions:

- Have I taught you what your mission field is? (It's those God brings across your path whom you can influence.)
- Have I helped you discover your ministry gifts and what your possible ministry areas are?
- Have I taught you how to share your faith with those God brings across your path?
- Have I taught you how to disciple people who will disciple others?
- Have I taught clearly how to behave in order to get ready for God's kingdom?
- Have I modelled and displayed kingdom living in my own day-to-day life?
- Have I asked myself, what more can I do to empower you to do your ministry?

May I conclude by asking: Who are those amongst your family, friends and colleagues that God wants you to talk to about Jesus? And who needs to see in you a display of the kingdom of God's grace and truth?

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. (2 Cor 2:14)

Final instructions

Acts 1:4-11

Jesus' job was done. Jesus had taught people all he needed to teach; Jesus had died on the cross to pay the price for the sins of all of people; Jesus had been proved he was the Son of God by being raised back to life from death. Jesus' work on earth was finished and it was now time for him to leave and return back to his Heavenly Father in heaven.

If you were managing Jesus' affairs, how would you organise Jesus to leave? How would you throw a farewell party for Jesus?

God organised it this way:

- 1) Jesus was with a group of his friends
- 2) He gave them vital last minute instructions
- 3) He left quietly, definitely and majestically in a way that left no doubt that he had left. He was lifted bodily up into heaven until the clouds obscured him from view. It must have been quite a sight.
- 3) Two angels then give assurance that Jesus would return for them in the same way. We understand that this will happen when God shuts down this old imperfect world and makes a new heaven and earth which we are invited to be part of.

What were the last minute instructions Jesus gave?

It was:

- Don't try and do anything for God until God gives you something
- God wants to give you the empowering presence of himself.
- He wants to give you his Holy Spirit to live within you to help you.
- God's secret proton energy pill for Christians.
- The Holy Spirit "proton energy pill" will give you the courage and the ability to tell others about Jesus whether they live locally, in the nearby regions, in nearby countries or in the most remote places on earth.