

Vision Sunday – A community of Prayer – Dave Rogers

Earlier this month we as elders met to pray and see what God was saying to us about where we are as a church and where we are going.

We looked at all the things we do as a church and held these up against last year's message of the fig tree – explain... We felt that the things we do at ABC are good and there was nothing obviously using resources with no benefit to the community or to us.

We believe that in most areas of church life we are doing well, of course there are always going to be resource issues but nothing that the church isn't rising to.

As we prayed and talked we were again drawn to look at ACTS 2:42-47, the picture of the early church.

The Fellowship of the Believers

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

If you want to know what ABC is about then this is it.

We want to be an authentic expression of church as it was originally intended.

So how do we summarise this?

God has called us to be a community. – A community of what though??

ABC is CURRENTLY a community:

OF HOPE – the local church is the hope of the world, we take the message of Jesus!!

OF THE WORD – we have a high value on the word of God and what the bible says

OF FELLOWSHIP – we do do things together!!

OF GENEROSITY – God has always provided through his people at ABC – time money and effort.

OF THE SPIRIT – we want to see the spirit move and for God to speak to us

OF WORSHIP – when we gather, we do lift up the name of the Lord in praise

WHATS MISSING? OF PRAYER

As we looked at this account from the bible we were encouraged, but also challenged.

In many aspects of this VISION ABC is great!!

There is one area God spoke to us very clearly about concentrating on, the area of Prayer, this was confirmed at our week of prayer in various ways but particularly with a picture **AP brought about being couch potatoes and needing to be stirred up to pray for those we love rather than waiting for "wake up calls" to cause us to pray.**

So just as ABC is a community in many areas,

God wants us to become a COMMUNITY OF PRAYER.

In fact, **the future of ABC depends on it!!**

All the things we do, the amount God will move amongst us depends on whether we become a community of prayer.

Now I do want to commend those of us who have an amazing prayer life. There are people in this church that pray all the time, they pray through the church directory, they pray for the church, its leaders and the community we serve. Thank you. The church needs those who pray in secret.

But what God would say to us is that a community of anything does things together, not just individually.

A community of prayer

A people devoted to prayer

A people that spur one another on.

At the moment this is probably the biggest area of weakness for us as a church!

As I said earlier at the week of prayer God confirmed this as a vital area of church life that is lacking, simply with the number of people that made it.

We averaged 10 people per night apart from the meeting where we prayed with and for the YP.

Sometimes we just need to look at the facts for God to speak to us.

Now the prayer meeting were superb, God spoke to us, he encouraged us, we were stirred to pray for many things.

10 people each night does not sound like a community of prayer!

Now today, we're not doing a critique of ABC, we are looking at what God is saying to us and that he wants us to move forward. The best way to move forward is to know where we are currently at!

So why pray? Well in all the other areas of church life there is an element that it will work well just with our effort, when we pray we get God involved. When we pray we understand God's heart, when we pray God chooses to act on our behalf and change things, when we pray the power of God is released.

When we pray we hand control over to God and acknowledge our reliance on him. So when we give everything over to God in prayer, he takes responsibility and we can expect things to happen.

And I don't know about you, but I find praying extremely hard work!! It is a discipline, a challenge. And I know we are a church that really does want to follow Jesus the best we can, with all our heart, so why is it so hard?

Well let's look at Jesus' best, the men that walked with him on earth, the disciples. Jesus was coming to the moment he would die on the cross:

Matt 26

36Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

39Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

40Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

42He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

43When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

45Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

3 times the disciples fell asleep at Jesus greatest hour of need. We can be like the disciples, do we fall asleep, or not pray when we need to?

The key from Jesus rebuke of the disciples is this:

"The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

We are weaklings when it comes to praying together, to be honest nobody wants to pray, even the greatest prayers find it a challenge and hard work.

Another picture during the week of prayer was:

Chris Collison was reminded about going to the gym. It's easier to use the equipment we're familiar with, that we can manage OK, but are hesitant or even fearful about using equipment we have never tried. We don't want to look silly having to ask how to use it or look undignified if we can't get the hang of it very easily. Let us press through with new things and be looking for a full workout in God's "gym of faith". We would look odd having great biceps and spindly legs! What faith muscles does god want us to be working on?

Prayer is a discipline, we need to train at it, the way we do that is gathering with others who can encourage us and teach us.

We are often like the disciples we let fleshly temptation or distraction stop us from praying and this stops us from carrying out God's will.

1 Thess 5

16Be joyful always; 17pray continually; 18give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

When we don't pray continually, we are not a community of prayer, and we are OUTSIDE of God's will.

Friends, this is an extremely dangerous place to be!!

So where do we go?

Firstly I want to say WELL DONE!!

Without all of us here, there would be no church....We are certainly a community in many areas our community would miss us if we weren't here, lives are being changed, but in possibly the most important area we are not there yet, but we can be!!

Prayer makes a difference like nothing else; it confirms our reliance on God

We can stay as we are and nothing much will change, or we can go for it and God will respond.

I'd like to read a story of a church in the US.

Jim Cymbala was the pastor of a small church in Brooklyn with 20 people when God said:

From this day on the prayer meeting will be the barometer of our church. What happens on a Tuesday night will be the gauge by which we will judge success or failure because that will be the measure by which God blesses us.

If we call upon the Lord, he has promised in his word to answer, to bring the unsaved to himself, to pour out his spirit among us. If we don't call upon the Lord, he has promised nothing – nothing at all. It is as simple as that. No matter what I preach or what we claim to believe in our heads, the future will depend upon our times of prayer.

“This is the engine that will drive the church. Yes, I want you to keep coming on Sundays – but Tuesday night is what it's really about. Carol and I have set our course, and we hope you will come along with us.”

A visiting pastor was with them and was invited to share, he said:
I heard what your pastor said, here is something to think about:

You can tell how popular a church is by who comes on Sunday morning.
You can tell how popular the pastor or evangelist is by who comes on a Sunday night
But you can tell how popular Jesus is by who comes to the prayer meeting.

This church has now grown to well over 6000 members.

Prayer really does work, it works because God has promised to respond to our prayers. Ask and you shall receive....

Many of us have seen prayers answered, we have seen God keep his promises over and over again, but we can still be complacent about prayer we pray.

RP had a picture at our week of prayer of a book entitled "Book of Excuses" and a fire. Time to throw our Book of Excuses on the fire. We need to stop reaching for that book, stop looking for excuses why we shouldn't get involved, cross the street, invite our neighbours, friend or relatives and pray. We need to replace it with His Word, His promises, the "Book of Reasons" why we can be involved.

Friends, I believe God is saying that if we become a community of prayer he can't help but respond, and those prayers that have not yet been answered will come to pass again and again, and the things we daren't ask him for will start to flow from this place and he will pour out his spirit upon us in a way we have never experienced.

And from this day on the barometer of ABC will be our prayer meetings; and what happens at these gatherings will

**be the gauge by which we will judge success of failure
because that will be the measure by which God blesses us.**

So how do we respond?

Today we are going to respond in a different way.

**I have got here a book of excuses, I am going to rip out the pages and give them to you.
And I want you, if you are ready and willing for ABC to become a community of prayer to
screw up your page and throw it into this bucket.**

Final Prayer

Lord we want to be an authentic church where Jesus is in charge, we want to be a community, a community of Love and Hope, a community of the word and the spirit, a community of worship and generosity, and we want to be a community of fellowship and of PRAYER.

As Jacob said when he wrestled with you we will not let you go unless you bless us!!
Forgive us for our excuses in whatever area of life following you but particularly in the area of prayer and as we ditch this book of excuses we say we do truly want to become a community of PRAYER!

Final thoughts. Over the coming weeks we will be looking at how we can practically help this to happen. Thurs am 6:45-7:30 Sun 10:10am

Please talk about this in small groups this week and spend a good amount of time praying in response, not just talking.

We'll look at the idea of prayer triplets, and more opportunities for us to gather as a community of prayer.