

13th Jan 2019: Life in Spirit 1: Community of Spirit **BCP**

READ Acts 2:42-47: Early church still the model for churches – nothing here that looks redundant or that can't be applied today.

Big vision of church – depth in 3 dimensions:

- **God** – apostles teaching, prayer, sign & wonders, daily meeting and praising God
- **Each other** – ‘fellowship’ (koinonia = oneness) – breaking bread (hospitality) as evidenced by v46 and radical generosity
- **The community** – signs of wonders public; also met publicly v46 and shared possessions publicly v45, v47 favour of all people, effective mission – people wanted to join this.

Holy Spirit not mentioned anywhere – but this is just after Pentecost, so can be described as the Community of the Spirit.

Spirit infused everything they did – not just dramatic stuff (miracles) their devotion to God and each other – it all needs the Holy Spirit.

Writing in the early 20th century, A.W. Tozer observed:

“If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference. If the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the New Testament church, 95 percent of what they did would stop, and everybody would know the difference.”

Challenging (written in difficult period in life of church), but worth reflecting on today. How much of what we do is not only God-inspired but also God-breathed? John Drane – biggest problem for church is that people today don't see it as spiritual – so they look for spiritual elsewhere – in all kinds of weird places!

But true church is Community of Spirit – can't be the church without it. Acts of Apostles really Acts of Holy Spirit. ‘We are being built into a place where God lives by His Spirit.’

As we begin this series, my dream and my heart is that we become this kind of church, devoted to the right things, empowered in the right way and bearing real fruit in the community. A place where everyone experiences this and it becomes part of our DNA. As I said last week, we have a once in a generation moment here at SM – but without Holy Spirit we won't be able to see our dreams come to fruition. So....

May God grant us grace to be that kind of people, for His glory.

Prayers – Billy Graham NY prayer: Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

Our Father and our God, as we stand at the beginning of this new year we confess our need of Your presence and Your guidance as we face the future.

We each have our hopes and expectations for the year that is ahead of us— but You alone know what it holds for us, and only You can give us the strength and the wisdom we will need to meet its challenges. So help us to humbly put our hands into Your hand, and to trust You and to seek Your will for our lives during this coming year.

In the midst of life's uncertainties in the days ahead, assure us of the certainty of Your unchanging love. In the midst of life's inevitable disappointments and heartaches, help us to turn to You for the stability and comfort we will need.

And in the midst of our daily preoccupations and pursuits, open our eyes to the sorrows and injustices of our hurting world, and help us to respond with compassion and sacrifice to those who are friendless and in need. **May our constant prayer be that of the ancient Psalmist: "Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end" (Psalm 119:33). PAUSE**

We pray for our nation and its leaders during these difficult times, and for all those who are seeking to bring peace and justice to our dangerous and troubled world.

We pray especially for our divided nation together, asking you to bring us together and to give us a greater vision of what You would have us to be. Your Word reminds us that "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 33:12). **PAUSE**

As we look back over this past year we thank You for Your goodness to us—far beyond what we have deserved. May we never presume on Your past goodness or forget all Your mercies to us, but may they instead lead us to a new commitment to **make You the foundation and centre of our lives** this year.

We remember too others known to us... **PAUSE**

And so, our Father, we thank You for the promise and hope of this new year, and we look forward to it with expectancy and faith. This I ask in the name of our Lord and Saviour, who by His death and resurrection has given us hope both for this world and the world to come. *Amen.*