

Last week, we were hearing a description of the Church (amazingly good), but for many of us, that hasn't been our experience.

As Paul described the church, he said some things that made us realise that the gathered worshipping community of Christ, truly is a 'foretaste' of the coming Kingdom of God. The church, is where we take off self, and put on Christ. **AND** we stop thinking individually, and we as a church – we as a community (with Christ in our hearts) – we put on the things **of** Christ... And so we :

- have a gut-wrenching compassion, for those who hurt;
- we're a people who are filled with kindness;
- humility (not just individually, but as a church, we think lowly of ourselves) (we don't fall into prideful marketing);
- Meekness;
- patient – bear with one another;
- forgive (because Christ has forgiven us), **and** because Christ is **in** us... The very nature of Christ, is to forgive, and so we do that too.

and;

- all of this is bound together with love (which makes it real). All of these things (beautiful attitudes and actions) are an expression of the love of Christ (not forced/pretend)...

And together, the peace of Christ, **rules** in our hearts (the “together” bit is important – we **were called in one body**)... We don't gain peace by avoiding other Christians who we don't like/get on/disagree with – we have peace, because the peace of Christ **rules**. It rules our very attitudes and actions.

That's pretty cool hey... Now, who wouldn't want to be part of a church like that??? And yet, for most of us, at some point, the church that we've experienced, is nothing like that...

And today, we might get a bit of an inkling why...

I learned many, many years ago (long before I became a Pastor), that the most conflict-free church meetings, were those that were held in the context of worship... When a church is worshipping together, it's hard to be at loggerheads with one another. As we meet with Christ, and as we express our thankfulness and adoration,,, conflict, is totally out-of-place...

But you know what – ‘worship’ isn't meant to be a means of managing potential conflict. Worship, is a way-of-life for the church. It's meant to be the way-of-life for Disciples of Jesus individually, **and** for us together as the church – living lives in worship; thankfulness; and adoration...

And so, it shouldn't come as a surprise, that Paul directs the church in Colossae, to worship.

1.

Now, there's several elements to worship, and Paul begins with “the word”...

V¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,

What is “the Word of Christ”? Well, it sort of has a double meaning here.

From the beginning of the Gospel of John, **Jesus** is known as “The Word”.

John 1:1 (ESV) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And so, for the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly, is for the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Christ, to dwell in our hearts. And the **richness**, is the fruitfulness, of the Fruit of the Spirit....

But the Word of Christ, is not only Himself. The Word of Christ, is what He says/teaches/commands.” – How could it not be???

John 15 holds these 2 elements together: Jesus said:

John 15: (ESV) ⁴ **Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.** ⁵ **I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.** ⁶ **If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.**

⁷ **If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.** ⁸ **By**

this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

And so, the command here (Colossians), is to **let the word of Christ dwell in us richly**. And for that to happen, we need to know Christ, and to know what He taught... How do we know this? Through the Scripture. And yet the majority of Christians today, Scripturally impoverish themselves.... Access to the Scriptures today, is greater than ever before. And yet, more than 2/3 of Christians are not even reading their bibles more than once per week...

Sadly, generally the church of today, has become a church that's biblically illiterate. *In Australia, only 31% of regular church attenders, privately read their bible more than once per week...*ⁱ

*And that number drops significantly, for those who claim to be Christians, but **don't** worship regularly. ...*

How does the word of Christ live in us, and not just meagre/miserly/miserable... This is about the Word of Christ

livingly in us **richly** – it gets pride-of-place – its importance is paramount...

It's about Christ in our hearts, richly producing the Fruit of the Spirit, and it's about knowing His word/teachings/commandments, and obeying Him...

How much we hunger for God's word, is a sure sign of spiritual maturity (Heb 5:11ff)...

One of the biggest causes of brokenness in church fellowship, is where the people of the church disagree, and often, the reason they disagree, is because we get so full of "our own ideas", we're only interested in God's word, if it affirms what I already believe...

But, for the word of Christ to dwell in us richly, means we don't:

- follow popular psychology;
- adjust the Scriptures to fit the attitudes of society;
- re-interpret the Scriptures to fit what I want my lifestyle to be

What it means, is we dwell in His word, and His word dwells in us... The teachings and commandments of Christ change us and transform us... I can guarantee you, if you read the Word, in all of its simplicity, and don't try and 'explain it away', you **will** be challenged by it... Jesus' disciples were constantly challenged by His words... And if I'm **not** being challenged, that's a pretty sure sign, that I'm not letting the word of Christ dwell in me richly...

Hebrews 4:(ESV) describes it like this:

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

That's how the Word of God is described, and that's the sort of word we're talking about... And yet, many treat the Word like flummery (bubbly sweetness, with no substance)...

2.

Righto. A second element of worship, is what we **do** with the Word... ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom

Teaching the word of Christ in a fellowship, is worship...

Strangely, most of us think that worship is the singing bit (but only if there's excellent music to envelop me)... but teaching and admonishing, is a primary part of worship.

Teaching BTW, isn't a time for

- regurgitating platitudes; or

- sprouting off spiritual-sounding slogans;
- sharing our experiences...

Teaching, is about hearing the word of God, and being taught the word of God.

Now, when it comes to teaching, it seems to me, there's 2 different types of churches.

One type of church, gives prominence to the Word of God. They will read the Scriptures, and then unpack and teach what's been read. If it's

- offensive, that's not a problem – the Word of God often is offensive;
- cutting, that doesn't matter. The word of God cuts deep.
- convicts me of sin, that's the Holy Spirit, and I'm led to repentance, and I can experience the grace of God...

But the fashion today, is to make the **message** the prominent bit, or even our own **experience**, the prominent bit, and then maybe refer to various bible verses and religious slogans to back it up... It's the age-old temptation – to turn the focus on ourselves, instead of the focus on Christ..

I think you know what sort of church we are.

I'm humbled, to be giving this message today. The focus of the Bush Disciples ministry (here; Bongeem; across the state & the world), is "teaching the word"... We don't teach a particular systematic theology / denominational hobbyhorse... – we just teach what the Bible says... And God has been growing the number of people who access these messages.

Not because we're so marvellous, but because by His Spirit, more and more people of God are craving simple, clear teaching, straight from God's word...

When I was younger, and spent endless hours driving tractors, I used to listen to this Baptist pommy preacher (David Pawson). My mum had boxes and boxes of his cassettes, and I would just devour these. I craved good biblical teaching...

I never had any idea that 30 years later, there'd be farmers on their tractors listening to their iPod, devouring the word of God, coming from this little church... And if you're one of those, we praise God that His word is going out and is at work in the hearts of those who hear it.

You see, **teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom** is critical, when it comes to the Word of God.

We all need teaching. I need teaching. In my experience, the hardest and most destructive people in churches, are those who are not teachable. Usually, the thing that makes us unteachable is self-confidence (pride).

We live in an era, where many of us like to believe that we can discover and believe our own truth... The saying is, "truth is subjective". "I'll have my truth. You'll have your truth."...

And that destroys fellowship. If you and I believe different things; if my image of Christ isn't the Christ of the Scriptures; if the Gospel I believe, isn't the teaching of God's word,,, how can we have unified worship and fellowship?...

But Christ has built a safeguard into His church (a safeguard we all too often ignore) – teaching **and** admonishment... And particularly “admonishment”, is what gets ignored. In fact, it is so ignored, I suspect that half the people in churches today, have no idea what “admonishment” even is...

I used to think that “admonishment” meant “correction”, and so admonish someone, was to correct them – to say to them “I understand that what you believe is this, but let me show you in the Word of Christ, that what you believe is wrong.”...

But “admonishing” goes much further than that. It’s not just “correcting” – it’s “**warning**”... And throughout Paul’s writings, we will often find him warning churches to reject false teachers/teachings, and to hold fast to the things of Christ.... And so, as **we** study the Scriptures, **we** will constantly be warned to reject false teachers/teachings, and to hold to the things of Christ...

But many folk skip over these warnings because “Hey, I’m not deceived...” And that’s exactly what the people who Paul wrote to thought...

And so, the job of the Bible teacher, will often include “admonishment” – warning... “Stop believing what’s popular, and start believing the word of Christ”...

Let that word of the **Lord** dwell richly in your heart – not the word:

- of the celebrity preacher
- that’s blunted down so that it’s not offensive
- that will let you believe whatever your heart desires...

But when a preacher preaches that, he won't be popular. It's always been that way.

Today, like in the Old Testament; like in the New Testament, to admonish, is Godly, but people hate it...

Think of the prophets of old. They would admonish God's people. And some were:

- beaten;
- put in stocks;
- imprisoned;
- killed;
- put in a hollow log and sawn in twoⁱⁱ

Think of Paul when he admonished. Some of the churches (he had planted) turned on him...

Not many of us like to be warned. Not many of us like to be challenged in what we believe about God...

And as a Pastor, there's been times that I've had to warn people,

- "What you believe is wrong"
- What you are doing, is sin;
- The things you feel are cravings of the Spirit, are actually a craving of the flesh...

and generally, people don't like to hear that... And so sometimes (not always), we don't see them at church anymore. They find a fellowship that will affirm them in what they believe, and won't offend them...

Sad, but it's true. And there are many people who do not regularly fellowship in a church today, because they have been admonished. The Scriptures have been used to correct what they believe, and to warn them, to hold fast to Christ and what He taught, rather than to take on the thinking of men... They're offended, and in their self-righteous pride, they completely cut themselves off from the fellowship...

And this is why it takes wisdom... We're not talking:

- human wisdom;
- people management wisdom;
- church growth wisdom...

We're talking Spiritual Wisdom – knowing the Word of God, and filled with the Spirit of God, and so teaching and admonishing, with the love of God (no matter what the cost)...

3.

The third element of worship, is probably the first one that comes to our mind: **singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**

For most of us, this is a natural thing, isn't it... Christians, want to sing to their Lord...

We just had our Christmas carols on Tuesday night. (thank the Lord, we got most of the way through before it rained)... But this year, we really encouraged more worshipping Christians to be in the singing group. And you know what? Even in the practices, the singing was the best that we've had in any

year... Do you know why? Because we weren't just singing songs. We were singing **praises**...

That's what Christians do. Our hearts are filled with the joy of the Lord, and we sing **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs** ... all sorts of genres...

4.

And we do it with thankfulness...

The very awesome wonder of God, is what causes us to worship, but as Christians, we have so much to be thankful for, and our thanksgiving pours out in worship.

5.

v¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

If we individually, and if we as a church, **do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus** that sums it all up, doesn't it...

In whatever we say/do, to do something in Jesus' Name, is to do it to honour Him. You see, we've taken off the old self. It's not about self anymore. It's about Christ. And for us to do something in the Name of Lord Jesus, isn't about doing what I want to do, and then trying to spiritualise it by saying, "I'm going to bring glory to You Jesus, by doing this"....

That's not what it means... What it means, is totally surrendering myself and my hopes and dreams and ambitions, to Him... And living for Him from now on...

It's what Paul is talking about in Romans 12: (ESV) ¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

And when we as a church do everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus, that's when we will be the beautiful church that He's designed us to be...

Let's pray:

We worship You, Lord Jesus.

We thank You,

that You have been so good to us.

You have lavished on us,

Your grace and Your mercy.

We didn't deserve Your love;

we didn't deserve Your sacrifice;

we didn't deserve Your calling,,,

and so our hearts are filled with thanksgiving

because You've been so gracious...

Lord, help us to do everything in Your Name.

To live for You.

Throwing off self,

And putting on Christ.

Teach us, Lord;

Give us wisdom;

Give us teachable hearts;

Admonish us when we need admonishing;

And give us the courage,

to admonish when our brother and sister needs to be warned.

Lord, give us hearts of love,

and peace,

in Jesus' Name,

Amen.

ⁱ <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=4975>

ⁱⁱ Hebrews 11