

## Deeper and Wider

Eph 3:14-21

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We are marking a significant milestone in our life as a church. Next weekend will mark 100 years since this church was dedicated as a place of worship.

To mark this event we have planned a number of events, beginning with the book launch this past Friday and leading into the Centenary Conference this coming weekend.

The conference will focus and remind us of the core ethos of Christ Church. David Prior will be teaching from the Word in a series of expository addresses from 2 Corinthians looking at "Authentic Discipleship". There will be seminars on prayer – pathways to prayer by Rosemary Prior, and where is God when it is hurting by Peter and Lizzie Smith. They are part of the New Wine network and New Wine has had a significant impact on my ministry and on Christ Church and so it right that this influence is brought into the mix.

There will be two seminars on mission and outreach specially looking at where to begin when reaching out to Muslims and to Jewish people. And then a major focus on children and children's ministry. Barbara and Hilary will be leading seminars and there will be a children's holiday club. Evangelism is also at the heart of our mandate and so Children's Holiday Club, the Outreach Breakfast and the Young Adults Alpha are key parts of the mix, as is having a good party and hence the Celebration Concert.

To help us broaden our outlook and be open to the wider context in which we live, through August and September we have a line up of visiting preachers from the Parish and beyond. The brief I have given them all is come and bring us a word from the Lord, as we celebrate this significant bench mark in our life as a church. I have said to them ask the Lord what message he wants you to give to us. That is what we want to hear. I don't know what they are going to say, but I hope they will be challenging and stretching.

To lead into all this I want to share with you what I believe God is saying to us as we celebrate the first 100 years of our life as a church and as we look to the next chapter in God's story for us.

## Introduction

By way of introduction I want to relate to you something that happened to me the week before last.

On Wednesday evening I was part of a group of men here in the church, including James Thomas and David Louw two of our Wardens. We have been meeting weekly as part of the follow on to the Growing in Jesus. It was not planned, but towards the end of the evening I was prompted to ask the group to pray with me about what was God saying to me – to us – about the building operation and the fact that as time has gone on and the rain has continued, less and less of what we had hoped for will be completed by the Centenary Celebrations.

What emerged through a time of waiting on God, and what I believe God drew our attention to was the following:-

1stly – that while the celebration is around the date that marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of the building we are celebrating God's life in people not buildings.

2ndly – following on from that it is the quality of the love we have for one another that will point people to Jesus rather than the quality of our buildings. That needs to be our focus. The way we love one another.

3rdly – we sensed God saying, *“There may be mud around when you celebrate the centenary, and the walls may not be plastered and painted, and everything won't be looking all spiff and pristine – but then neither are you. You are a work in progress as well. I haven't finished with you yet.”*

As Christ Church Kenilworth one of the dangers and snares I see the enemy using to trip us up, is pride.

We are proud of our tradition as Anglican, Evangelical, Charismatics ... and rightly so.

At Christ Church we want to do things well – the preaching, the music, the courses, the events, ... we take pride in doing things well ... and rightly so. But we can so easily slip into pride that is not good, and that verges on arrogance and disdain for what is not up to standard.

I have no doubt that God is reminding us that we are a work in progress. That we don't have it all together. That we are not finished and fully functional. That we are not there yet.

As one person put it, if everything was finished and looking good, when people come in, what they would see? What would be focus would be?  
The lovely buildings.

But is that what God wants them to see?

Is that what will draw them to Jesus?

I don't think so.

What will draw people to God is to see us a community of people trying to follow Jesus and being honest and humble and authentic, acknowledging that we are a work in progress.

So what better celebration of our life could there be but to say to those who join us ... come and look at the mud and the unplastered walls ... they are a good reflection of who we are ... we are a work in progress...

Christ Church (the buildings and the people) is under construction ... God has not finished with us yet.

I had a sobering moment of reflection as I was praying through all of this as I recalled reading that when Christ Church was build, work began in 1903, but after the foundation had been laid nothing happened for 5 years. We ran out of funds. So things all went on hold and all there was, was the foundations. The comment is made in the annals that the foundations became a favourite play ground for the children of the neighbourhood.

So here is the sobering thought. Some things have not changed. We are still a work in progress and things take a lot longer than we would like. There are no short cuts – no quick fixes. But in our “unfinished work in progress state” God attracted children to Christ Church. We were a place they could play and feel welcome in. There is something in there people.

God uses our *unfinishedness* to draw people to himself, and our *unfinishedness* is some times more attractive than pristine spruced and paintedness.

What has God said to us? We are and remain a work in progress.

### **Now there are two important implications that follow.**

The first is that it is a reminder that we walk humbly with God, and Christ Church, we need to hear that.

But the second is this. Because we are not finished, there is more that God wants to do in us. There is much more.

Quoting St Paul from today's reading ... (Eph 3:20)

*God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,*

One of the lies of the enemy is, "This is as good as it gets". Don't expect anything more of God.

*If you have been around at Christ Church for a while – maybe not 100 years – but for a while, and if you have been to some courses and some conferences and the like, well then you know all there is to know about God and the way he works and what he does, there is not much more to the Christian life. This is it. Don't expect anything to change. "This is as good as it gets".*

That is a subtle but very effective lie that the enemy uses to keep us marginally effective, but not making an impact on the community and the city in way that God wants us to.

*God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,*

I have entitled this sermon "**Deeper and Wider**" because I believe that God wants to take us deeper and stretch us wider. Deeper than we have ever been before and wider than we can imagine.

## **Deeper**

By deeper I mean discipleship: deeper into God's word. Deeper into worship and prayer and intimacy with God. Deeper into the living as true followers of Jesus.

There is much that we do as Christ Church that is focussed on helping people to go deeper with Jesus and find him and know him in every day life.

We run a whole array of special courses:-

- The marriage preparation course
- The marriage course.
- The parenting course.
- The boundaries course.
- Beyond divorce.
- The journey to significance for men in mid life.
- The what's your mission weekend with Jeremy.

- Growing in Jesus.
- The men's and women's weekends.
- Dwight Prior's unveiling the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Mentoring, spiritual direction, .... Quiet mornings.

The list goes on. All aimed at helping us to go deeper with God ... to see him more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him nearly.

I want to say that in all of these ... there is more! You are a work in progress and God wants to take you deeper than you thought possible. Deeper than we imagined. Deeper than we even asked or hoped for.

The message that I hear God bringing to us at this time as we celebrate 100 years of God grace, and look at these unfinished buildings is, there is more.

We live as those caught up in the **mystery of hope**. The hope is that things can change. Our hope is that God in his Son Jesus intervenes in history – into our lives and into our bodies and brings healing, and into our communities and transforms them, and in to our world and makes everything new. That is the hope we live and proclaim. Things do not have to remain the way they are. Jesus came to make all things new, and he hasn't finished with you and me and Christ Church and Kenilworth and Cape Town and South Africa and the world yet. There is more.

But we proclaim it as a mystery, because we live in the place of “the already and the not yet” of the Kingdom of God. There is no formula. We are filled with awe and wonder at the way God intervenes and heals the sick and feeds the 5,000. But we are not given a formula which says if you have 5,000 hungry people get five loaves, three fish, twelve baskets and say this prayer and hey, abracadabra! No it is a mystery.

A mystery is not a truth that we take hold of but a truth that takes hold us.

So I believe that God wants to take us deeper into the mysteries of God's truth. Deeper into the mystery of our lives been hidden in Christ ... and all that that means.

We are a work in progress and there is more ... more than we can ask or imagine.

But if we only grow deeper ... if that is our only focus ... then we are in danger of becoming consumer Christians, and that is not something any of us want to be.

## Wider

I also believe that God wants us to grow wider. Wider in our reaching out in mission and evangelism.

A lot of effort has been put into helping us grow in depth, and we devote time and resources into running courses, into counselling and mentoring, into teaching and training – all things that are designed to help us go deeper and walk more closely with Jesus in every day life.

While over the last number of years we have grown numerically to some degree, I have always considered that the size and style of our church building has meant that we would not grow significantly in numbers. It would be well nigh impossible to enlarge the church building. We don't have the room and would not get planning permission, and does Cape Town need another mega church anyway?

I have been challenged to think outside of the box. Why does "church" have to be on Sundays? What about planting more congregations right here in this building? We could have another service on Sunday afternoon, and why not on Saturday afternoon too? In fact we already have about 70 or more meeting in cell groups in Christ Church Centre and Callow House on Saturday evenings. That is church!

We could also look at starting Christ Church congregations that meet in other locations and could be "implanted" into existing churches that need new life. At this point the details and scheduling are not important. What is important is that we shake off the shackles of limited thinking. We can, and I believe God wants us to grow and make many more disciples of Jesus. That after all is the essence of the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

*"... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you".*

How do we do this? How do we make more disciples right here? How do we grow wider not just deeper?

We have to make a paradigm shift. We need to think differently about Christ Church and who we are.

## **Connect Groups**

My vision is to see us start Connect Groups – termed as such because they connect us with God and one other. They would meet every alternate week, usually on a Wednesday evening, during the school term, and range in size from 25 to 40. Once they reach 40 they would split into two groups and continue growing.

### **Open and geared for growth**

Connect Groups are open and geared for growth. They are welcoming gatherings where new comers can join with ease. They provide a secure context where people care for one another and grow in exercising their gifts.

Connect groups are creative places where bold ventures in mission and evangelism can be initiated, but they will be evangelistic in their very nature because a Connect Group is an open group. Friends can be brought along and new comers invited without having to seek the group's permission first.

They will meet either in a home with a large enough gathering space, or on the church plant, or at another suitable venue. The format of an evening will typically, but not necessarily, be: a social gathering time including something to eat and drink; a time of worship; teaching from Scripture; discussion and prayer in groups.

Hospitality and welcome are the key ingredients. Remember that Jesus said that it would be the way we love one another that people would know we are his disciples. People experience and know the love of God in small groups much better than in a larger gathering like this. That is the testified to again and again.

Connect Groups provide places where we can grow and develop various ministries – worship leading, preaching, teaching, pastoring, evangelism, prayer, hospitality, leadership, ... all the gifts and ministries needed to plant and grow churches, and in particular the ministry of leadership.

### **Pastored and lead**

Connect Groups will be lead by two pastors – a couple, or a team of two. The Connect Group Pastors need to be leaders. Leaders are people whom others follow.

They would need to be good at gathering others together; good at delegating; good at helping others to grow in their gifting.

They need to nurture faith in others and get them to step out into new areas of ministry. In short they need to be “leader pastors” who lead the way in making disciples, growing the church and multiply its ministries as they pastor and lead their Connect Group.

For me raising up and walking alongside the Connect Group Pastors will be my main focus of ministry. Pastoring and discipling them will be a top priority in the way we allocate and use resources.

### **What is this saying about our existing Small Groups?**

The strength of our existing Small Groups is that they provide places where trusting supportive relationships can grow. To grow and go deeper as disciples of Jesus we all need places of confidentiality, intimacy and accountability – CIA. This takes time, and constantly adding new members militates against this desired outcome. You can’t grow in intimacy if you are constantly adding new people to the group.

You can’t grow deeper and wider at the same time. You will do one or the other. That is why I believe God wants us to have both Connect Groups that grow wider and Small “CIA” Groups that grow deeper.

Connect Groups are not geared to provide “CIA”. They are open and geared for growth. We need to be looking for other contexts in which we can grow these supportive relationships and build “CIA” into our walk with Jesus.

This can happen in various contexts. It could be a group who work or who are study in the same location who meet in a lunch hour to share their lives and pray for one another. It could be a small group of men in an accountability group. It could be three women who meet before work to pray for each other. It could be a group of young mothers meeting mid morning to support each other, or a group of fathers meeting for support and encouragement as they parent their children. It could be a group of couples and singles who meet on the alternate Wednesday evenings for fellowship and prayer.

The field is wide open, and the size of the group could vary. The important thing is that we have these supportive “C.I.A.” relationships and give time to allowing them to grow.

There is no reason they have to break up when a Connect Group multiplies. You don't have to be in a Connect Group with the same people in your Small "CIA" Group. The vision is for us to grow wider and deeper and the Connect Groups and Small Groups meet different needs.

### **New Congregations**

My vision is that in Connect Groups we will see being developed all the gifts and ministries that are needed to plant and grow new churches. We would see people growing as leaders, in the ministry of preaching and teaching, worship leading and prayer ministry, hospitality and evangelism.

The next step would be to group a few Connect Groups together and launch a new Congregation. As I said earlier they could meet here in this building, but they don't have to. They could be the seed of a new church plant or an implant into an existing church.

We are not **renovating and improving these buildings** so that we can simply do what we are doing now with greater ease. No! I believe that these buildings are going to be used even more. That Connect Groups will be meeting here sharing meals, welcoming new members, worshipping, praying... That there will be more congregations being planted right here.

And looking further on I believe that God wants us to grow wider. To move out from here and establish new churches, new Warehouses... new communities of prayer and service impacting this city and beyond and bringing the message of God's transforming love in the way we live.

That is my dream and vision as I look ahead to where I believe God is leading us.

So what are we doing in these centenary celebrations? We are just pausing to say thanks, and then we push on. We are a work in progress and God has not finished with us yet. Thank goodness for that.

