

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg\$

Preached by Rev. Geoff Read on Sunday 13th October 2019

3-D Church (1): Introduction & “In”

Part of the way that the human brain works is to be constantly looking for patterns, for meaning and sense-making

As images strike our eye, the brain is sorting and matching, drawing on previous experience, to make sense of the data that is being fed in

One particular ability we have is to see in three dimensions, to give depth and perspective beyond the flatness of two dimensions

It's the difference between this (circle) and this (ball)

Our sermon series for the next 3 Sundays is called 3-D Church, in which we will think about what is Church in God's good purposes

The term “church” in the original Greek is *ecclesia* which literally means “called apart”, and we have echoes of that in our NT reading in Colossians 3 – “As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved” (v12)

But *ecclesia* is not a calling apart in an exclusive, holy huddle sort of way

Church is a place of doors open to all, outfacing and inviting to the world around, and offering a particular way of living together, of community, in which “whatever we do, in word and deed (is done) in the name of the Lord Jesus..” (v17)

Church is to be the place where the love of God is real, seen and experienced, as it impacts and moulds our lives, attracting others to be touched by that love too

As Robert Warren dreams....

“God's way of being fully human has been demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ, is available to all by the work of the Holy Spirit, and is currently being demonstrated in your nearest local church.”

Robert Warren, *Being human being Church*

He calls this 3-D Church with an “In, an Up and an Out dimension – community, prayer and worship, and engaging in God's loving purposes in the world aka mission

We need all three dimensions for there to be a healthy, balanced, growing church life

Like the three legs of a stool, if one is missing or less developed, everything can become wobbly

We see these 3-Ds in our NT passage today as Paul write to the Church in Colossae

Note how he is writing to them he uses the plural, not the singular – that's the “In” dimension of community:

- as God's chosen ones (v12)
- bear with one another (v13)
- clothe yourselves with love (v14)
- You are called in the one body (v15c) – that image of the church like a human body with many parts is a famous way Paul talks about the 3-D church

They are to root that life together in the word of Christ “dwelling” in them – listening to the Scriptures with expectation, not just expecting His occasional visit, but Christ dwelling,

Likewise, their life together is to be characterised by heartfelt prayer and worship, “to God” whatever the worship style, “with gratitude in your hearts” (v16) – this is all the “UP” dimension, our relationship with God

And that IN life together, that UP life of grateful worship will be attractive to others, OUT – that’s the “chosen one” reference in v12

There are echoes of the original chosen people of God in the OT, whose calling was to be a “light to the gentiles” to everyone else, drawing them to the living God, His love and His ways!

That’s now the OUT calling of the Church in the NT

One of the reasons I responded to God’s call to become Chaplain here was because the Council said the Church was asking questions about what next, how to grow and develop

As a Church Council we started to use a planning tool called **Mission Action Planning** or MAP, used by lots of other Anglican churches

It’s a simple cycle of looking at what is, prayerfully asking what could be, and then setting simple annual goals to work towards, then having a go, before then repeating that cycle

In MAP we have found it helpful to think about our Church life as In, Up and Out

Indeed, we have tried to set a simple goal for each – some will weave into what we are already doing, others may need new initiatives

So, in this sermon series, I want to tell you about each of the 3-dimensions and then the goals we have set for each

So, let’s start with the dimension of “IN”, our life as Community

I think that the words we use in daily conversation matter

And thinking about “IN”, it’s the difference between “going to” and “belonging to”

When you talk about this Church which do you use?

Is Church a place you go to?

Or a community you belong to?

Paul is clear in Colossians that for him church is a community to belong to

Our community together is where we experience and offer one another a particular sort of love, Christ’s love

Indeed, it’s in our community life together, even in how we do disagreement the Christ-like way, that we grow in His likeness: READ v13

This is what it means to “clothe yourselves”, a term Paul uses twice in just a few verses

These are the practices, the living out of love in the body of Christ

“Clothing ourselves” is also about discovering together our spiritual gifts, given by God through the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church for In, Up and Out

And we can only be this sort of community when we are close to each other, when we spend time quality together - being, and not just doing

Its time with a focus on “being”, of sharing in life together, that is probably the biggest factor in being either a “going to” or “belonging to” church

With all the other demands on our time, how central is belonging in our lives, even for those who are busy in serving in the church?

As a Church Council we have reflected hard about “IN”

We thought about something a number of us were hearing in different ways

And it was the message: “not another bloody rota”

Some here are feeling over stretched by doing things, maybe drawing back from “belonging to church” to just “going to church”

Others here are feeling unengaged or even uninvited to come deeper into our community, unable to move from “going to” church to “belonging to” our church

Its not about filling rotas, finding volunteers, “doing”

Fundamentally it’s about “being”, each one of us belonging and finding our place in our church, loving others within it, and doing so in a way that reflects all the variety of being an international church in every dimension of church life

So for the next 12-18 months the Council want to offer this **“IN” Big Goal** as a priority

- **In** (our life as community): to grow our understanding of the distinctive nature and purpose of Church as a community in which every member has a place and plays a part and is helped to understand the gifts they have and how to use them in the Church and the world.

And to help us do this we are going to focus **on 3 things**

The first is this sermon series – to learn together what the Bible has to say about Church, community and belonging and using our gifts

Downstairs we have a “Come and Find out More Fair” – it will happen for three Sundays over coffee. It’s not about recruitment to another bloody rota. It’s information helping us all appreciate the In, Up and Out of our church and the way each dimension plays out in practice – seeing opportunities, you may want to get involved, but fundamentally its helping us grasp the variety of our In, Up, Out church

We are also going to try and run events based on people’s gifts and passions, rather than through volunteering. We are trying this out with our between service Breakfasts, running them with people who feel that hospitality is their passion and gift from God

And we are also planning a short course in the New Year called Your Shape in God’s Service to help people identify the gifts God has given them and how to use them in their work, community, and the Church

So in God’s purposes, “IN” is about the way Church is a community to belong to, rather than a just place or a service to go to on a Sunday

What’s Church for you? What does belonging feel and look like for you right now and what would you like it to feel and look like in the future: in a moment of quiet prayer, hold that question before God.

There is a summary of our MAP process and our 3 Big Goals downstairs in the “Come and Find Out More” Fair, ask a Council member for one