

The Great Commission

Sunday 5th May 2013

Wixams Church, Bedfordshire

Do oink or do you cluck?

I want to tell you the story of Farmer John; now, Farmer John had been a farmer all this life and was coming to retirement. So, all the animals in the courtyard get together. They said 'we want to get Farmer John a present to express our gratitude for all he has done for us over the years; he's been there when we have needed him; he's been there to milk us, feed us and care for us. How can we say thank you?'

Now, there was a little voice and it was the voice of the chicken (now, I'm not very good at Chicken voices, so you'll have to bear with me). The chicken said 'I know what Farmer John would really like – I think we should give him a full cooked English breakfast, the best meal of the day. Now, all the animals thought it was a wonderful idea, well done Chicken; all expect for the pig.

Now, I am abit better at pig voices, the pig said 'onik onik, I know what Farmer John would really like, and I don't think it is a full cooked breakfast. You see the thing is, its alright with you chickens coming up with this idea because all that is required from you is a donation – an egg. But as for me, the pig, its nothing less than full commitment'

And so, that why I ask you – do you onik or do you cluck or are you neither? Are you offering God a chance donation or are you prepared to think again and afresh about commitment?

Story of one good sermon

A question then - who are we and why are we here?

What gives Wixams Church its identity? What holds us together?

It may be easier to begin by saying what does not give us our identity. It is not that we all worship together at the same service, whether at brunch, 'normal Sunday' or even Messy Church.

It is not the style of music and worship that we find helps us engage with God that unites us and gives us our identity. Some find structured services with more traditional hymns that are big on narrative and doctrine help them draw into the presence of God.

Others find more informal, less structured services in which the songs focus more on praise and the character of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, more helpful.

We are not buying into a consumer culture by providing both types of service. We are trying to enable as many people as possible to engage with God in a meaningful way on Sunday, without compromising the good news of Jesus Christ.

It has to be more than we all worship in the same building each week that makes us 'Wixams Church'.

As we develop, and there are plans to host at times to churches of other denominations, but that does not make them part of our Church.

The church is the people and not the building.

Is it our unity in Christ, our sure foundation that gives us our identity?

Our basic unity has to be in Christ. If we are not united in Christ we are not united. But we are united in Christ with all our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world and throughout history. That does not in itself help us define what makes us one.

Perhaps we are getting closer if we say it is the values we share that define us. The Evangelical Alliance survey we did last year showed we value fellowship, worship and biblical teaching very highly. Again, those things are good and without those shared values we would not be united - but we share those values with many other churches, particularly those that share our evangelical/renewed tradition.

Is it then, that we share common purposes?

St Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, talks of a partnership in the gospel. The word 'partnership' is a very helpful one. Partnerships work together to achieve a common aim or purpose.

Rick Warren, in his book, 'The Purpose Driven Church', argues that the great commandments and the great commission determine a church's purposes:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' and, 'love your neighbour as yourself' *Matthew 22:37,38*

'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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.' *Matthew 28:19,20*

We are to

Love the Lord - worship

Love our neighbour - service

Make disciples - evangelism

Baptize - fellowship

Teach them to obey - discipleship

Once again, however, those purposes we share in common with all other churches. What we do not share with them is how we fulfil those purposes in the place God has set us in at this time in our history. That is unique to us. It is our vision and that should unite us as a church and give Wixams Church its identity.

What is God calling us to?

What does God want this church to be in five years time?

How can we work together to fulfil that calling?

It is about partnership. Partnership must involve everyone pulling their weight, using their gifts, being properly trained and resourced in order to undertake their task to fulfil a common vision.

So, what is our vision?

It is not for me to tell you at this stage... or even Tim!

It is for us to discern together under God. That is the process I would ask you to engage with over the coming weeks and months.

I believe God gives his vision to and through his people and that we discern it together prayerfully.

Will you join me in seeking to discover God's vision for us at this time?

Lord God,
we rejoice in your greatness and power,
your gentleness and love,
your mercy and justice.
Enable us by your Spirit
to honour you in our thoughts,
and words and actions,
and to serve you in every aspect of our lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**