

PRAYER WITH FERVOUR

This morning we are doing two things that we do together every year at this time. We are coming together as a church to commit ourselves as God's people to serve Him, and at the same time sharing our direction for 2021 – things that we believe as God's people here at Birchwood Community Church we should be doing together this year as we serve Him.

Before we look at these just wanted to explain what we are **not** doing. We are –

- **Not changing our foundation** – I Corinthians ch 3 v 11 says *“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, **which is Jesus Christ**”*. Jesus is the foundation on which His church worldwide is built
- **Not changing what Jesus has told every church & every believer to do, namely -**
 - Obey the Great Commandment – *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul and mind and Love your neighbour as yourself”* (Luke 10 v 27)
 - Fulfil the Great Commission – *“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation”* (Mark 16 v 15)
- **Not changing our belief that only Jesus can build His church** (Matthew 16 v 18). Our vision is to see **“Jesus changing lives”** - for the better, giving people hope and purpose – using us yes, but it is always Jesus who does the work and makes a difference

These beliefs are the foundation of all Christian churches all over the world; they are what God has directed. We will never alter these. If we do, then put simply, we will cease to be a church.

What we are adjusting are our goals, our focus for this year.

Every local church faces different needs, different challenges and has people with different gifts. Therefore, each church must seek God to make clear to them the direction that He wants them to take, the specific tasks that He has placed before each different church. This is what those who serve you on the Leadership Team have been praying and discussing together and we now want to share these with you in what we call the church goals for 2021.

Our church goals for 2021 are these; hopefully written in a way that will make them easy for us all to remember and work with – Prayer, Care, Share, or to explain a little further...



- **Prayer** – with fervour
- **Care** – with love
- **Share** – with boldness

What does “Praying with fervour” mean as our 2021 Prayer goal?

Sure that you already pray – thank you, we must do this and please don’t stop. The Bible says we must “**pray without ceasing**” (1 Thessalonians ch 5 v 16). But what we want to encourage this year is that we pray together as a whole church; that we seek God together passionately, realising that God’s blessing on our community is desperately needed.

So we are looking to the Prayer Team - that is Dorothy, May and Trevor (and we thank you on behalf of the whole church for what you do to help us pray) to –

- Organise Quarterly **Whole Church Prayer events** where we all come together as God’s church to pray
- Trial 24 hour virtual **prayer “boiler rooms” linked to key church or community events** – e.g. Easter, Christmas, Schools re-opening etc

Why? Why is it important that we come together as a church to pray? Can’t we simply pray on our own? Of course we can, we must, pray on our own.

But the Bible teaches that we should also come together as God’s church to pray. There are 2 special blessings that God grants when His people come together to pray fervently. What do I mean? Let’s look at 2 passages together.

The first is in 2 Chron 20. God’s people were under attack – they were in desperate need - and they came together from across the whole nation to pray fervently. Verse 13 says “*All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.*”

Everyone (men, women and children) was praying – and what happened next? **God spoke!** “*Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah, and he said: “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: `Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.*”

So blessing no 1 – God speaks in many ways to us, but especially so when we come together to seek Him fervently – with passion. We want to hear Him, to hear His direction, so we are asking that everyone comes together to pray on certain occasions

The other passage is Acts 12. You may remember that Peter is under arrest and awaiting trial – again it was a desperate situation and there was fervent prayer. Verse 6 says “*So Peter was kept in prison, but the whole church was earnestly praying to God for him.*”

What happened next? **God acted** – He sent His angel who woke Peter up, freed him and walked Peter out of the prison. Then when Peter turned up at the prayer meeting, he couldn’t get in – Rhoda was too excited to open the door to him and then no-one believed her story!

So blessing no 2 is that while God acts in many and varied ways, He does so especially in answer to His people when we come together to pray fervently.

So the 1st goal for this church for 2021 is that **we come together as a church to pray fervently so that we hear God speak and see God act**

CARE WITH LOVE

Good morning Church

The last 9 months have been particularly challenging for all of us individually in many ways, and as things stand, we will have to endure these challenges for several more months.

1 Cor 12 says: that as a Church, we are the body of Christ; each one of us is a part of it. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

We have also been challenged as a body of Christ, through separation, and the challenge continues. We have not been able to meet as a church family.

I thank God that we have the means to at least join together virtually on Sundays and other days, but like myself, I'm sure you all miss meeting together in person. As such we miss the corporate time of worship, the in person social interaction, that ability to place an arm around those in need and offer words of encouragement. The ability to care for each other in such a way has not been possible.

Hebrews 10:24 -25 says:

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Although the meeting together bit has been curtailed for now, we can still encourage each other and spur one another towards love and good deeds. We are called to do this.

There are many in our Church family that have been very active supporting many good works; and although they may be considered strong, they too get drained. There are also those among us who are alone, some unwell and some with other needs. How can we support, care, and encourage each other?

Praying for each other is important and that has been happening and God has answered so many of our prayers for which we are thankful.

We have virtual Life Groups (we would like more of you to be involved) and Encounter calls. Both have been good, in terms of support, and will continue.

Another way we can support each other is through direct one-to-one contact, and although we cannot meet in person as yet, we do live in an age where communication is possible in so many ways. A personal way to do this is via a phone or video call. Many of you may be doing this already.

The Elders/Church Leadership team would like to ask you, so as to build each other up in the body of Christ, to commit to connecting with someone else in the fellowship at least once a week by phone or video call. Maybe someone you know well or maybe someone you would like to get to know better. We need to support, care, encourage and love each other Church. Can you commit to making a call once a week?

By committing to this, when we are once again able to meet together on Sundays, as a Church, it will hopefully not seem like a reunion of long-lost friends.

SHARE WITH BOLDNESS

So, 3 instantly memorable goals – Prayer, Care and finally Share. Specifically: Prayer with fervour. Care with love. And share with boldness.

In 2021 we want to build on what God did last year and as a church, whilst there is still uncertainty on how much of this can be done online and how much will be in person, we believe there are great opportunities to be had through Easter and Christmas. So we specifically want to ask you to invite your friends and neighbours to an Easter celebration, which might be combined with a homecoming, in which we invite people who may have been away from church for some time, for whatever reason, to come home to BCC. Or perhaps it will be a post-covid celebration. Also we want to build on the drive-in Carol service, which created a big impression, by having an even bigger Carol service with invited guests and dignitaries.

Let me share how this idea of sharing our faith **boldly** came about... On Tuesday we were sharing with HeArt and our bible study was actually a short film that summed up the final chapters of Acts. And something just struck a chord with me.

Because right at the end of this amazing book all about the incredible exploits of Peter and Paul and the early church, the very last verse of the Acts of the Apostles says this:

“Paul proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!”

And then it just stops. That’s it! There’s no ‘And they all lived happily ever after’. We don’t hear what happened to Paul.

It’s as if the writer, Luke, was saying, ‘To be continued. This is what happened - Jesus changed lives through Peter and Paul and others. And now, they’ve passed the baton over to you. The story is still being written.

“Paul proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! And so did the guys from BCC. In 2020, in 2021, and beyond. So this verse applies to us. Specifically:

1. Proclaim the Kingdom

The **story** of Acts continues - because the **message** continues. The message that Peter and Paul proclaimed has exactly the same relevance and the same content over 2000 years later! What’s that message that we need to proclaim? Jesus loves you! That’s the extremely short version. You don’t need to be a preacher to tell someone that. If you want to go into more detail you can give the slightly less short version of the message: Sin condemns us. But Jesus saves if we repent of our sin and choose to follow Him and go His way instead of my way! Jesus changes lives. He has a plan for each one of us.

So this year, we need to proclaim the Kingdom. People are desperate for good news right now. They are fed up with bad news, they want to know that there is hope and they have a future. How will they know that Jesus loves them if we don’t tell them? Through our actions yes, but why not in what we say also? And if you really can’t tell them yourself then invite

them to church online so they'll hear it from someone else. In 2021 we need to preach the Gospel. We will preach the Gospel more. Helen and I have read this little book by Roger Carswell. He asks, "Where has all the gospel preaching gone?" He's got a point. Many churches today are failing to proclaim Christ and the cross. He says 'Christ alone, not wise and eloquent words, or even erudite exegesis, can save, feed and bless the soul'.

2. Teach about Jesus

Then Paul says, "**Teach about Jesus.**" Jesus has given us a blueprint for life. It works! In 2021, we need to speak less about ourselves and our problems and more about Jesus and His solutions. We sing, 'What a beautiful name it is, the name of Jesus. There is nothing about Jesus of which to be ashamed. He is altogether lovely in every way. His teachings, His parables, his miracles, his life, his death, his resurrection, His ascension into heaven. And the fact that He is coming back again. We need to teach about Jesus. When we speak about the name of Jesus, guess what!? People listen.

3. Do it boldly and without hindrance

Paul says "**Do it boldly and without hindrance.**" There are many things that can hinder us when we try to speak about Jesus. Usually it is ourselves – our own shyness, or our own sin or our own apathy. How can we remain apathetic when people are literally dying without Jesus? Roger Carswell uses this illustration:

'2 boats were passing each other on the Mississippi River when an old man said to a passenger as he pointed to the other boat, "Look, there's the captain!"

When asked for an explanation he said, "Years ago, we were going along like this and I fell overboard and the captain rescued me! Ever since then, I just love to point me out!"

Surely we feel this way about Jesus. Since trusting in Him, He has won our hearts and we want to speak of Him. Let us do so with fresh vigour.'

So let's share Jesus with those who don't know him and do it with vigour – with **boldness**.

So this year there will be some great opportunities for events in which people can hear the good news of Jesus and for us to invite people, whether online or in person, to hear the gospel. Just like Trevor preached it on the car park. People want to hear and we will invest energy, time and money on good quality, non cringe events which will present the reality of Jesus to people. All you need to do is invite and pray. So we are asking for boldness but we aren't expecting you to do anything outrageous or death defying. Simply to give folk the chance to hear about and accept Jesus. Or maybe take one small step towards Him. We can't do it for them. But we can give them the opportunity. So we can commit to taking the opportunities that present themselves. That's it! And God will do the rest. He will draw people to himself – He is doing it already. So, for each of us, 3 goals, 3 challenges to commit to this year.

Prayer – with fervour; Care – with love; Share – with boldness. Are you up for it!?



renewing OUR PROMISES

Birchwood Community Church Promise, 2021



LEADER:

The 'Covenant' is about God's promise to us, His people, and our promise to Him in return. It is about accepting the means of grace by which we live in a loving relationship with God. His gracious offer to us also brings a challenge: if God is committed to us, are we prepared to commit ourselves in return to God?

God made a promise with the people of Israel, calling them to be a holy nation, chosen to bear witness to his steadfast love by finding delight in the law. The promise was renewed in Jesus Christ our Lord, in his life, work, death and resurrection. In him all people may be set free from sin and its power and be united in love and obedience. In this promise God gave us new life in Christ.

For our part we promise to live no longer for ourselves but for God. We meet, therefore, as God's people have met before us, to renew the promise which enables us to be part of the family of God. Therefore, let us give ourselves afresh to Him, trusting in His promises, and relying on His grace.

First, as God's family, let us join together in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

ALL:

Our Father in heaven, holy is Your Name

Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven

Give us today Your daily bread

And forgive our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

For the Kingdom, the power, and glory are Yours, now and forever.

Amen

LEADER:

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us again accept our place within this promise which God has made with us and with all who are called to be Christ's disciples. This means that, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we accept God's purpose for us, and the call to love and serve God in all our life and work.

Our vision at BCC is that we will see **Jesus Changing Lives**. That is our prayer, and all we do will be to this end. Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us. Therefore, let us make this promise of God our own and commit to 3 specific goals for this year:

- Prayer with fervour - walking beside God and “praying without ceasing” that He builds His Church.
- Care with love - constantly supporting and encouraging our Church family towards love and good deeds.
- Share with boldness - reaching out together to share boldly and without hindrance the good news that Jesus is alive to our community.

Let us give ourselves to Him, trusting in His promises and relying on His grace. Let's pray.

Eternal God, in Your mercy and love You call us to live our lives by trusting and walking with Jesus Christ.

In obedience we hear and accept Your commands; in love we seek to do Your perfect will; with joy we offer ourselves anew to You. We are no longer our own but Yours. Would you please join with me:

ALL:

Heavenly Father,

I am no longer my own but Yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever You may place me, in all that I do, when life is good and when it is hard.

I lay everything about the coming year before You. I fix my eyes on You alone. You are the author and perfecter of my faith – I yield to the story that You are writing in and through my life. This year, I commit myself to fervent prayer, to loving care for my church family and to share my faith boldly with the people you lead me to.

We pray that by Your grace we will see Jesus changing lives.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.