

One of my favourite observations is how God's ways are profoundly counter-cultural.

We see it in the whole concept of **Grace** –undeserved love (where it is God who is wronged yet he is the one who sacrifices himself)

We see it in the way God **values people** (not because of what we can do or what we look like) but because of who we are in him.

We see it in the way God **calls us to live**

- to be self-less rather than selfish,
- to be giver rather than takers,
- to serve rather than try to be top-dog

God's ways are counter-cultural, counter-intuitive – YET they work.

They produce communities of love,
people secure in God's love
people at peace with themselves
people at peace with each other!

This is what church should be like –

Church:

this unique,
sometimes laughable,
slightly odd
sometimes disastrously painful,
but very often fantastically brilliant thing called "Church".
You and Me. Right here. Right now.

When operating well,
when operating according to God's guidelines,
Church can be the most wonderful,
the most exhilarating and
the most emotionally moving operation on earth.

From the Macro-scale of leading a world-wide campaign to reduce the 3rd world debt which it did a decade ago.

To a national scale, where in Rwanda it is one of the most potent forces for good in the country – spear-heading post-genocide Reconciliation, HIV Awareness, and the building of hospitals & schools & community centres and works-programmes

*To the absolutely personal level –
where the command to forgive one another brings two people together who had been at war for years*

When working well –
Church is the most wonderful, exhilarating, emotionally moving operation on earth.
Jesus describes us as salt, as light, as stars in the darkness, as a people who march to a different drum-beat.

But the question is:
how do we achieve this...
When so much of what we are taught,
what we absorb,
what we see modelled around us
is travelling in the opposite direction
how do we achieve this?

This is Paul's concern in his letter to the Philippians
And this is what we've been looking at over the last few weeks together.

What are the hall-marks of church?,
what is it that you and I are trying to form here?,

Well, Paul says 3 things in Philippians 2. He says
We are a community
that shares a common **Aim**
that shares a common **Attitude**
that shares a common **Act to follow**...

And that's what I want to talk about this morning ...

1. We are a community that shares a Common Aim.

God says in v1 " if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,

then v2 make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

What he is saying is this:
"Look if you get anything from your relationship with Jesus
if he encourages you when you're stressed
if you're comforted when you're worried
if you're secure when attacked
if you're able to act with compassion towards others **THEN**...
be of one purpose –
share **this** common aim.
Be clear about what you're all about

As your knowledge of God increases,
as your relationship with Jesus develops
as you begin to put into practice what God is teaching us
become more and more clear about your purpose/your aim.

These guys (that Paul was writing too) were called Philippi United.
They were the first team to play the "game called Church" in Europe.
They were the first church to be founded on European soil.
In the beginning we know that they were made up of just four people
a Gentile doctor, a Roman Jailor, a Greek slave girl and a Turkish businesswoman.

This was the first church in Europe!
Different Nationalities, Different Genders, Different Social Status', Different Cultures, Different
Backgrounds
yet all brought together, all united in Christ!

And look at us...
We are **very** different people,
with different tastes and different backgrounds and different jobs and different personalities.

We are as an unlikely bunch of people as you're ever going to gather in Lewes.
Yet we are the "Southover First 11:15" team, established in 2011
And we are called to share **and be clear about** our common aim and purpose

You know, in football

wearing the same strip is not the purpose of the team

– its helps but it's not the purpose.

singing the same Terrace Songs is not the point of the team

– its helps but it's not the purpose

listening to the same rousing Locker-room speech is not the aim of the team...

The purpose of the team is (quite literally) to share a common goal.

If I asked any one of the 20,000 spectators or

any one of the team, or

anyone here: what is the point of the England football team?

(which may have many philosophical answers!)

what are they trying to achieve

every single one of us would say

to get the ball in the opposition's goal more times than they get it in yours!

Everybody is crystal clear on that...

So, here's the question – what is the point of church?

what is our aim, our purpose

is it to wear our Sunday best (well clearly not)?!

is it to sing our favourite Terrace Songs?!

is it to hear a rousing locker-room speech (from your favourite rousing locker-room speaker?!)

No, (hopefully some of those things *could* be helpful)

but it isn't the point of church.

Our common purpose, our common aim, (in a nutshell), in one phrase is

“to know Christ better, to make Christ better known”

If Christianity is ALL about a relationship with God (and it is)

then our purpose is to know God more, to make God more known.

Our encouragement, our comfort, our fellowship our compassion towards EACH OTHER and OTHERS
flows from our encouragement, our comfort, our fellowship, our compassion FROM knowing God

This is the only way it can work!

Church has this common purpose – which we all are called to aim at.

And just as

We don't go to a football match to see them play rugby.

We don't go to see Brighton expecting a bunch of ballet dancers afraid of getting their kit dirty (there's got to be a joke in there somewhere!)

We don't go to watch Lewes hoping not to be disturbed if we had a quiet candle-lit supper in the opposition penalty area.

Just as we hope our football team knows its common aim and goal

So we must be clear on what defines us and shapes us.

We are here “to know Christ more, to make Christ better known”.

Friendship, Support, Care, A good Sing, great soup, incredible oozy cheese, Social Justice projects, and making a difference –

all of these are great and indeed imperative!! –

but they flow from why we are here!

Just as

*Passing the ball, nutmeging the oppositions, posing for the team photo's, getting incredible pay packets, having movie star recognition and cute girl-friends is not purpose of the England football team.
But are spins offs...*

So all this good stuff... is not our purpose – they are consequences.

If we get to know Jesus better, if we strive to make him better known
everything else follows and we will become
one of the most wonderful,
one of the the most exhilarating and
one of the most emotionally moving operations in Lewes
Salt. Light. A community marching to a different drum-beat.

That's what Paul is saying
If you have any of these benefits from knowing God...
Be of one purpose.

So my question is – will you.
Will you be of this purpose.
Because this is the only things that makes a difference (in here – in the heart)
It is the thing that changes us from being a disparate bunch of people
into a really exciting group that God can use!

Firstly, our common aim.

2. Secondly, we have a common ATTITUDE.

*v3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.
v4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

We are used to the TV slogan “because you're worth it”.
Well the Bible's slogan is “because *they* are worth it”.
“Consider others better than yourself” – says God.

Now, where will you ever hear that preached in our society?!
Where will any school, or any politician, or any TV soap or (indeed) any opinion former ever say to us:
“be humble, consider others better than yourself?”.
It doesn't happen!

We live in a **consumer** society and God calls us to be a **servicing** community!
We live in a society BIG on “human rights” but God calls you and me to be BIG on “**human duty**”.
We live in a world that is very **self**-focussed and God calls us to be very **you** focussed
If ever you wanted to hear something counter-intuitive, counter-cultural – you've just heard it.

God doesn't simply say
“don't do anything wrong, don't break the law, don't hurt anyone else, don't be unkind to each other”

He says, I need you to have a completely different mind-set,
I call you to a sea-change in attitude,
I invite you to completely re-appraise your approach to life
I need you to love, I need you to go, I need you to serve others.

You say “dream on preacher” – this will never happen.
Well maybe you're right - in the “kingdom of the world” perhaps this IS just a pipe dream –
but what about in the kingdom of God? what about here in this church? what about you and me?

Look,
is it not your dream, to find a people who want to care for others?

Is it not your dream, to find a people who genuinely love?
Is it not your dream to find people wanting to serve others?
To make a difference!?

Sure it is!

It is YOUR dream, it is MY dream, but more importantly: it is GOD'S dream first!
And it won't happen unless you are part of it!

Name me one place in our society where our kids are going to be taught – robustly and unambiguously “put others first, humble yourself, it is your duty to care for others regardless of gender, race, colour, sexual orientation, wealth or background”.

Name me one place!

You won't find it in schools, you won't find it on TV,
you certainly won't find it in Parliament.
“count others better than yourself!”
That's not going to win any votes!

But this is the common attitude we called to share in Church.

After all

Isn't this what Monday Club is all about?
Isn't this what Causeway Prospects does?
Isn't this why we formed Southover Counselling?
Isn't this why we are still about to launch Southover Care?
Isn't this why so many go to Rwanda?
Isn't this why you pay for me and our Ministry team?
Isn't this why the Sunday Club leaders and the crèche leaders are out there right now with our kids?!

Why? – because they care!

Because they serve even when they are getting nothing out of it.
Because David Cameroons BIG Society is an old idea that God invented when he formed “church”

The truth is, that to be church we have to be radically different in our attitude to the world.

look around you –

This is **our** common calling
to share a common aim “to know Christ better, to make Christ better known
to share a common attitude “to serve each other”

3. And finally to share a common Act to follow.

Because the question is why? Why should we?
Oh I know it works, I know it makes sense, I know it sounds good.
But bottom line... **Why should we?**

What could possibly **motivate** us to sacrifice ourselves for others?

To serve others

To give up our leisure time on a Sunday morning to belong to be part of this crazy, odd-shaped bunch of people?

Why should you sacrifice your money, your time, the 1001 other things you could be do to be part of us?

The answer is simple: because we have the same act to follow.

v6 Your attitude should be the same as Christ's Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant... ”

John tells us that “*through and for Jesus all things were made*”

And then read right here that
one day v7 - he laid aside this position, this power, this glory.
one day v7 - He took off his splendour, his might, his majesty, and
and made himself nothing: a nobody and a servant.

God models himself what he calls us to do.

So why did **HE** do it?
He did it because: it works – yes
He did it because: its good - yes
But he did it because *“he considered others better than himself”*

Hang On! Just Pause, Just rewind!

But he did it because *“he considered others better than himself”*
This is the God of Heaven!
This is one who made all things,
the one from whom all things flow,
the one for whom all things exist –
and he considered others “better than himself”!

What others?
Well, I am looking at them. You!!

Listen in tightly to this...
For you “he made himself nothing”
For you “he took on the form of a servant”
For you and me “the everlasting Word became flesh and humbled himself, and became obedient to death
even death on a cross”!

This is why our aim is to know God –
because when we do we discover someone like this
it helps us discover ourselves
our true value, our true purpose, our true aim.

The amazing thing is:
that when you and I see Jesus – we see ourselves precious by God!
when we know him we know why we are made!
And that knowledge has enough power to light our souls for all eternity!
And to enable us to become servants and create the community that we long for...

The author Philip Yancey once wrote:
*In my career as a journalist, I have interviewed diverse people.
Looking back, I can roughly divide them into two types: stars and servants.*

The stars include sporting heroes, film actors, music performers, famous authors, TV personalities and the like. In my limited experience, these “idols” are as miserable a group of people as I have ever met. Most have troubled or broken marriages. Nearly all are hopelessly dependent on psychotherapy. In a heavy irony, these larger-than-life heroes seem tormented by incurable self-doubt.

I have also spent time with servants. People like Dr. Paul Brant, who worked for 20 years among the poorest of the poor: leprosy patients in rural India. Or relief workers in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, or other such repositories of human suffering.

Although I was prepared to honour and admire these servants, to hold them up as inspiring examples. I was not, however, prepared to envy them.

But as I now reflect on the two groups side by side, stars and servants, the servants clearly emerge as the favoured ones.

They work for low pay, long hours and no applause, “wasting” their talents and skills among the poor and uneducated.

But somehow in the process of losing their lives they have ended up finding them”.

As we get to know Jesus more, we know ourselves more

As we give our lives away to him, we **find** them

As we humble ourselves, God **exalts** us

Jesus shows us that the upside down values of the kingdom of God work

that the counter-intuitive really makes sense

that being counter-cultural delivers the only culture that we long for.

We love because we were loved first

We serve because we were served first

We give because we have been given – a full measure, pressed down and overflowing.

That’s what knowing Christ is all about - that’s why we want to show others.

Look if I give you ONE sweet you may eat it yourself.

If I give you TWO sweets you might eat one now and save one for later

But if give you 10 MILLION sweets everyone of us will start giving them away!

It is the same with Christ....

You want to love others – you must see how generously, how abundantly, how superfluously you are loved by God – the only one who really counts.

Our common aim – to know Christ more, to make Christ better known

Our common attitude – to serve others counting their needs as more important than our own

Our common act to follow – to be like Christ.

Will you join us?

Will you commit yourself to this unique, this sometimes laughable, this odd, sometimes disastrously painful, but very often fantastic thing called church?

You and Me. Right here. Right now.

Will you give yourself to Christ and to us?

This is who we are!

Join us.