

# **ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 2ND MAY 2021**

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT CHURCH: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CHURCH?**

*“Welcome to our ‘Church at Home’ service transcript for Sunday the 2nd May 2021. This week we are continuing our series looking at the essential questions about church with ‘What is the Purpose of Church?’ Last Thursday we all got some exciting news about restrictions lifting, and I am delighted to share with you that on 16th of May we will be reopening our building for in-person services! All the details are in the attached letter. - Rev. Andrew Gill*

### **Call to Worship – Psalm 22:25-28**

*From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.  
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.  
May your hearts live for ever!  
All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the Lord;  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.  
For dominion belongs to the Lord,  
and he rules over the nations.*

### **Opening Prayer**

Everlasting Father we bless you for sending your Son, your only Son, whom you love, into the world, so that we might live through him.

Lord Jesus Christ we bless you for bringing life and immortality to light through your Gospel of peace.

Holy Spirit we bless you for giving us new life in Christ, and for filling our hearts with his love.

Merciful Lord,  
we humble ourselves in your presence,  
confessing our unworthiness and sinfulness in your sight.  
We have broken your holy law.  
We have put ourselves first  
and failed to seek your kingdom and righteousness,  
and neglected the love of our neighbour.

God of compassion,  
pardon all our wrong doings  
and forgive our sins.  
Cleanse us from all unrighteousness,  
and renew a right spirit within us;  
through the grace of Jesus Christ,  
our Lord and Saviour.

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Give  
us grace to love one another and walk in the way of his commandments.  
Amen

## **Readings**

Matthew 22:34-40

*When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'*

Matthew 28:16-20

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'*

### **Sermon - Essential Questions; What is the Purpose of Church?**

Nearby to where I grew up there is an interesting old building known as the bottle tower. It's quite odd to look at, shaped like a bottle, and I always remember thinking what its purpose could be. Then it was explained to me that it is a type of building known as a folly. Follies are ornate buildings that have little or no purpose whatsoever. Maybe you've seen them around the country too. Many of them were built during times of famine to give work to those who were hungry. But besides being curious things to look at they have no real function or purpose.

For many people, they look at church communities, and they think they are a bit like a folly; they keep people busy, they have got interesting buildings to look at, but beyond that they have no useful purpose. But of course church does have a purpose, it is the greatest purpose of all! We exist to love God, love others, and to make disciples. The problem is that churches often forget this purpose, or we focus on one part of it and neglect the others leading us to become ineffective.

We are doing a series on the essential questions of church, and today we are asking the question, 'What is the purpose of church?' The whole of the Bible unfolds the answer to this question, but it is expressed simply in the greatest commandment and in the great commission. Jesus was once tested by an expert in the Jewish law and asked what the greatest commandment was,

and Jesus replied, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’”* (Matthew 22:37-39) The first purpose of church is to love God, what we call worship. God is our creator and we worship him for who he is, we worship God because he is good, just, powerful, kind, wise, and holy. And we love him for what he has done for us, because he made us, provides for us, cares for us, and through his Son he has saved us.

We worship God in lots of ways, by singing, by being thankful, by praying, by listening to his word, through giving and serving, and by living a life of obedience. Worship is the first purpose of the church, and it is also the most important thing for all humanity. The Westminster Catechism begins by saying, ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.’ Church exists to love God, and to love others.

Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment and he replies with two because they are the two sides of the one coin. The love of God is inseparable from the love of others. But what exactly does it mean to love our neighbour as ourselves? So often when we think about love we think of it just as an emotional response to someone or something because they make us feel happy. But in the Bible love is so much more than that, it is also a choice we make in how we treat another person regardless of how they make us feel. Love means to put the needs of others equal to, if not above, the needs of our own. We as a church are called to love three categories of people. Firstly we are called to love each other, the fellow members our local church, by encouraging them, caring for them, carrying each other's burdens, and practically sharing and providing for each other. Secondly we are called to love our neighbours, so those in our community. All the businesses, homes, and schools near our church are to be blessed by us. And thirdly we are called to love those that are in need, whether it is those in our community, those in our country, or anywhere in the world, by practically

giving what we can to help. As a church we are commanded by Jesus to love God and others, but we have also been commissioned to make disciples.

Just after Jesus's resurrection and before he ascended into heaven, he gave his disciples, the church of that time, a job to do. In Matthew 28:19-20 he says, *“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.”* Jesus has commissioned his church to make disciples. A disciple is simply somebody who trusts in Jesus, and by his help, tries to live like Jesus. This is key, church is not just a community of disciples, but we are a community of disciple-making disciples. Our goal should be to see more and more people come to, and grow in, faith in Jesus. Church is not a cruise ship where Christians just put in time until they get to heaven, church is a search and rescue vessel. We are in a mission to save people out of sin and despair, and bring them into the hope and salvation of Christ.

We are commissioned to make disciples, and we do that by going, baptising, and teaching. We are to go out into our communities, our families, our workplaces, our schools, our sports clubs, and to be witnesses to Jesus by how we live and speak, and by simply inviting people to church. We as a church are to baptise and bring people into the fellowship of our church. And we are to preach the gospel and teach the word of God. This discipleship process is lifelong. When I became a Christian, about a quarter of a century ago, that was not the end of my discipleship, that was just the beginning of the journey, because I still have more things to learn about who Jesus is and what it means to follow him in this world. As a church we are called to be disciple makers, and we do that by going, by baptising, and by teaching. Over the next few weeks, as we continue on in this series, we are going to be unpacking this a bit more, and thinking practically how we can do this

both generally, and specifically in the next few months, as church remains to be under restrictions.

Church has a purpose, it is to love God, to love others, and to make disciples. When a church takes the greatest commandment and the great commission seriously, and relentlessly pursues these three purposes, it is not only life changing, but it is world changing! I believe that it is only in the purposes of church do we find the purpose of our own life. Every human is on a quest trying to find identity, affinity, and meaning. We are trying to answer the questions of; *Who am I? Where do I belong? And what is my purpose in life?* The answer to all those questions is found in church. We were made to worship, and we are created in the image of God. The more we know him and glorify him, the more we truly find ourselves. And in God's family we find our home and a loving fellowship. When we join with God in his mission, we find our calling in life. The invitation to church is not to look at a building, or to attend a service, but to belong to a people that love God, love others, and that make disciples.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father God,

Thank you for your church that you are building on the cornerstone of your Son Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Thank you that through his blood you have called us into your holy fellowship of worship, service, and mission.

Come Holy Spirit,

help us to love as we have been loved. Empower us as we go to make disciples of all nations, for the glory and praise of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.