**#49 Why worship must be Accessible (14:20-25)**

How to organise our public gatherings: what Ch14 is all about.

* Gathered together
  + /individual experiences – however blessed & wonderful. Gathered together. Eg: SiT: great – blessed – meaningless for guy standing next to you: home. Church: encouraging each other. S/t: sacrifice what you want for sake of others.
* Accessible
* Involving
* Orderly

**Kick off:**

**v20** Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children.

* Bit brutal isn’t it? Grow up.
  + Strikes me: sort of thing say: really obvious and they should know better. Must be more obvious point to them than to us – to us: really hard to understand!
  + Had to laugh: quote from big book![[1]](#endnote-1)

Do my best to explain what’s going on: few minutes – lot clearer.

* In Ancient Cor: They did church on Sunday[[2]](#endnote-2) - like us – and like us: visitors.
  + Ppl come w friends – family – curious – bribed – genuinely exploring faith – Jesus.
    - If that’s you today: very welcome – lovely to have you here.
* This part of letter: all about: what unbelievers will make of your public worship services.
  + Ppl in ch thought: If the visitors hear us speaking in tongues, they’ll all be amazed and become Christians!
* P disagrees! Two quotes from OT here:
  + **v21** – paraphrase of Isaiah 28:11-12: ‘With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.’
    - In Isaiah, God is warning his ppl: foreign army is coming to defeat you. Their foreign languages spoken in your nation: sign of my judgement. But even when you hear it, /listen.
  + P: uses that: saying: foreign languages – SiT - won’t convert unbelievers. Actually, historically, sign of judgement. In fact: spells that out in **v22** Tongues, then, are a sign … for unbelievers.
* Worse – think ur mad: **v23** So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and enquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?
  + Imagine: fairly rowdy - chaotic church service
    - Lots ppl SiT – angelic prayer language – even for Xns there - /understand what’s going on – last week: /good job of encouraging each other – being body of X together. But kinda used to it.
  + Non-Xns “enquirer”: these ppl are crazy. Totally /message we should be giving out: watch out: loonies on the rampage!
* Instead, what they need to hear is a clear explanation of the gospel – in a language they can understand!
  + **v24** But if an unbeliever or an enquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment…
    - So, someone comes to ch: curious – wants to understand what happened to their mate Dave who used to be an arrogant, manipulative toerag and now loves Jesus and is trying to get his life straightened out.
    - Come in – ppl prophesying: speaking in normal words – understand – about sin – judgement – need a saviour – rescuer – and – good news! – there is one: Jesus
    - Lived a perfect life - /hint of sin – ever. Died on a cross – punished by God - /for his own sin – but for yours & mine.
    - Judgement is coming, but - Repent and believe: saved.
  + So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’
    - Quote from Is 45:14 – about non-Jews coming to faith in the God of the Bible. And most of the ppl in Cor were /Jewish – converts from Greek paganism.
* That’s basically what’s going on. What can we learn?

**Our services should assume the presence of unbelievers**

* Many ch today: /need to assume that – rarely true. Effectively a closed community.
  + “We’re not going to do anything to connect w culture – not up to us to help them understand. If they’re going to be saved, the Lord’ll bring them” /Believe they exist?
  + Ever been to a club meeting for 1st time – or a pub perhaps – walk in – immediately know: /welcome. Intruding on their “family”. Hope ch /like that.
* This is a community – but /closed community.
  + The love that’s here – open to others. Church, fundamentally ought to mirror Trinity:
    - F-S-Sp – infinite, eternal love. Always been – always will be – relationship at the core of who God is.
    - But /selfish rel - /closed-off rel. God invites others to share in his love – his love overflows to his creation.
  + God himself is our model. Love – rel – but open – willing to grow – draw more ppl into that love.
* Opposite: make ch ALL about the unbelievers.
  + Like, they /understand all the spiritual stuff – that /bring them in – or keep their interest.
  + Will like: fire-breathing. And motorbikes. So we’ll have our pastor ride into ch on a motorbike and then show off his fire-breathing circus skills. I kid you not[[3]](#endnote-3).
    - America. Unbelieving Brits are a bit cynical for all that nonsense!
  + But that’s what happens when you make Ch all about appealing to the non-Xn.
* So: balance. What P’s pushing for in Cor: /Make the entire service about the unbelievers who might be there – but be sensitive to the fact they are.

**Our services should make us think**

**v23** if…everyone speaks in tongues, and enquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

* These ppl: crazy. Wrong msg: Xn faith: thinking. **Romans 12:2** be transformed by the renewing of your mind
* All love to celebrate when someone’s life turned around – was full of hate – anger – pride – addicted – selfish.
  + Changed: /that any more: child of God – living for him.
* How happen?
  + /Primarily thru instant HS explosion – experience. Happens occasionally.
  + Mostly: mind changes.
    - I understand my sin – need for a saviour – rescuer – helpless on own – powerless to change.
    - Understand now who X is – friend of sinners – died to redeem helpless & lost ppl.
    - Understand: submit my life to him – him: bear my sin for me – so I am guiltless before a holy God.
    - And so I will live differently. I will live out what he has done in me. Understand I am a child of God now – Sp in me: can defeat sin.
* Xn: mind-faith. Thinking faith[[4]](#endnote-4). Lots of others faiths: /thinking - /same way
  + Hinduism – Yoga (proper yoga) – highest state: all five senses – and mind – “still” – turn off intellect – empty mind[[5]](#endnote-5). Idea is: entering Nirvana – total emptiness – nothingness – goal of Hindus - Buddhists.
  + Xn bro-sis – have to be careful of “mindfulness” stuff – hugely popular in culture. Eastern meditation – what “mindfulness” is – focus on self:
    - Centring - your inner self, self-actualization, your breathing, your body – your emotions.
    - Why? B/c in eastern thought: you are the centre of the universe. You have the answers. You are God.
  + Bible’s soln to problems is /empty ur mind. Instead: pour in God’s truth!
    - Be still and know I am God[[6]](#endnote-6). Focus on right things – understand he is bigger – in control – mind -> control – overcome emotions – actions.
    - Bible: focus on X. Fill your mind w J. Meditate on Jesus[[7]](#endnote-7).
    - Bible-perspective: you cannot fix yourself – need a rescuer – saviour. So fix your eyes on him - /on you b/c /fix you!
* Our services should make us think – should be obv to everyone we are not “out of your minds”. Might disagree – should be clear /mad.

**Our services should be orderly**

/Visitors to think we’re crazy. If it’s chaotic, they will! Much more on this in 2weeks. **v40** everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

* Cultural heroes to us: footballers – media celebrities.
  + Ppl try to dress like them – sound like them.
* In Cor: cultural heroes: Pagan gods: Dionysus – god of wine.
  + Get drunk & stoned – crazy time.[[8]](#endnote-8) Known as “raving ones”.
  + Paul to Cor: unbelievers come in: think ur worshipping Dionysus – god of wine. In fact: Acts 2[[9]](#endnote-9) – thought same.
    - Peter: It’s only 9am! Goes on to give them a sermon – make them think! Change mind!
    - Think back to ch 11 - sharing communion in groups w friends - /sense of togetherness – some of them drinking far too much communion wine[[10]](#endnote-10).
* Talked a bit about eastern rel: empty mind. Others: frenzied behaviour – drunken behaviour:
  + Pagans – priests of Baal (1Kings 18) – frenzied dancing round altar – shouting – louder & louder – cutting themselves – blood flows.
  + Lots of religions do that: thumping loud music – heightened emotional states – euphoria that comes.
    - Careful it’s Sp - /good bassline.
* Our services /chaotic. Again: /give wrong impression Xn. About having an ordered mind! “Dressed and in his right mind”[[11]](#endnote-11)

**Our services should communicate Jesus clearly**

**v24** if an unbeliever or an enquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment.

* Prophesy: clear speech – as opposed to SiT: unclear. In preaching: clear on gospel. Who Jesus is – and why you need him as your saviour.
  + /Just set of moving stories. Rel easy for an experienced speaker to move an audience. Been in sermons – conf talks – hilariously funny – or deeply moving – wiping tears – deep feelings: joy – regret – anger – sorrow.
  + But next day: all gone and honestly /remember the point of the story.
* Want to be really clear: all about J here. All about forgiveness & transformation. Tagline: Life and Hope in Jesus Christ.
* Comes through understanding - want to make you think. Here to be transformed by the renewing of our minds[[12]](#endnote-12).

**Our services should recognise the work of the Spirit**

* But – balance that out - /give impression: all about intellectually convincing ppl about J.
* Also believe in power of Sp. When Word is opened – /Jon speaking – or Simon: HS speaks!
  + Even if I was the best – most eloquent presenter in world – won every debate I’d been in (Far from true!) - /be follower of J.
  + Might convince you: an intellectual basis for faith – but /have faith for yourself.
  + HS has to convince - convict. God has to do s/t. What means: **v24** they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare.
  + Need HS to do that work - /ppl. He does that thru word...
* Every preacher tell you: s/t ppl come up: so relevant – so helpful – felt as though God were speaking directly to me – only one in room. Like: set this up? How did you know? /Me!
  + Gave you a defn of prophecy some time ago: “A human report of a divine revelation”
    - Preaching: I’m reading divine revelation all week –> my human report of it.
  + Rare: Prophetic gift: s/o comes up – coffee – I really think the Lord wants me to share this with you – encourage you – help you. Bang on. No way – possibly known.
    - Can happen to unbelievers too – or often young Xns – know God is speaking to you: So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’
  + That’s what we want: only Sp of God can humble s/o – speak so powerfully – so convincingly. Life is transformed for ever.

*Pr: do that work of transformation – renew minds – incapable of changing ourselves – v weak but also v proud. Call on you: humble us – fill us w word – HS come in behind – bring to life. Change hearts of stone for flesh.*

*Pause: speak to him yourself.*

**Discussion questions (leader)**

The sermon was about how our church services connect with unbelievers. There are loads of questions here and there’s no way you can do them all. So choose a few.

**Icebreaker: Think about the last time you went into a completely new place where you had to interact with people you didn’t know. What was it like? How did you feel?**

Genesis 18:1-8 explains why Muslim people call Abraham the “Father of Hospitality”. He was deeply hospitable to complete strangers. In the same way, we can do the same for visitors in church.

1. What was Abraham’s first step in being hospitable? (v1) He looked up and noticed the strangers! How good are you at noticing strangers? Maybe it’s impossible to figure out completely, but maybe you could look out for new people who are a bit like you (a student, a single mum, an older person, a single man etc)
2. How did he respond to the strangers? Made the first move (v2) and hurried over to meet them. Are you the kind of person who hides in their tent, or the kind that hurries over?
3. How does Abraham’s greeting fit with his culture, and what would be a more acceptable way to greet someone in ours? Bowing low to the ground might freak our visitors, but a warm handshake and a genuine smile goes a long way!
4. Put yourself in Abraham’s position. How much of an effort does he make? “Don’t pass me by” – he almost demands they connect. There’s a bit of a cultural thing going on here – maybe there’s someone in your group can explain it? He certainly makes a huge effort: bringing water – a precious commodity in the dessert – and preparing the best food he has (v6-7).
5. What practical ways can we be mindful of unbelievers who are in church? What can the pastors do better? Give us feedback on what the group say! Here are some ideas to get you going:

* An efficient welcome team: walk in – rabbits in headlights – where to sit? Maybe we could do better in filling up from the front?
* Be clear about parking
* Make parents feel their children are safe and cared for. How?
* Welcome packs
* Eye contact, a smile, and a chat
* Connect on social media
* Making sure the building is as accessible as possible: level access, iPads, loop
* Offering a Bible – or help with finding the page?

1. We all know that we need to speak to visitors in church, but where do we go from there? After you’ve exchanged pleasantries, what do you do next? What can we do the next week to make them feel welcome? Kick around some practical ideas here: exchanging phone numbers – connecting people with others they might have common interest with, inviting to your homegroup, linking people with Christianity Explored.
2. If you’ve invited someone to church recently, how did you feel when they turned up? Elated? Nervous about what they’d think? What parts of the service do you think are most and least “accessible”? What did they think? Is there anything that your Christian brothers-sisters could have done to make it easier for you or for them?
3. Should we welcome everyone who comes into church in the same way? What do the characters in 2John v7-11, Titus 3:10 and Matthew 18:17 have in common? They are false believers – people who claim to be Christian, but all they actually do is stir up trouble. Have you experienced that? What sort of cautions should we have in welcoming everyone with open arms? Careful balance: friendly but cautious with people who claim to be Christians until we can figure out why they’re there. Are there any other types of people that we ought to be wary of welcoming? Dissatisfied members of other churches, people under discipline from other churches, serial wanderers, potential paedophiles. How does that work practically?
4. The word “hospitality” in the Bible literally means “being friendly to strangers”. How does that expand our ideas of hospitality? And how does 1Peter 4:9-10 help to motivate us? To me, v9 is a pretty universal command. V10 though, reminds us that there are different giftings and some will inevitably be better at this than others. How gifted are you? And don’t forget, we go through different seasons of life: maybe some can for a time, or can’t for a time?

Pray for:

* Pastors to get the right balance between caring for the flock and welcoming strangers.
* Our many visitors to be radically changed by understanding the gospel. And that the Holy Spirit would so be at work in our church that unbelievers would “fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’”
* Your friends, neighbours, relatives, colleagues, who you could invite to church.

To chat about:

* Parking in Shelton – how is it working for everyone? Have people figured out how to pay for the Uni car park?
* If group members do not get the “WhatsOn” emails, they really should! [www.park-church.uk/whatson](http://www.park-church.uk/whatson)
* Don’t forget: Testify this Sunday evening! Come prepared.
* Talk about helping Christian people with dementia – St Matthias Hanford, Sat 7th March 10am- 12:20

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1. It really is: 1200 pages! Beale & Carson: Commentary on the NT use of the OT, p741-742. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Acts 20:7 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. My YouTube is down right now, but these things are not hard to find. Here’s a similar one: <https://metro.co.uk/2018/11/27/pastor-accused-of-having-jesus-complex-after-flying-into-service-on-zipwire-8183284/> Or: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-59lR_DhGoc> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. In fact it’s that very same thing that Paul says in v16,19,20 – he wants to be a thinking Christian, especially in the public gathering. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Katha Upanishad 6.10-11 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Psalm 46:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. A couple of nice articles: <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/6293> <https://www.charismanews.com/opinion/58612-6-reasons-this-popular-meditation-trend-is-dangerous-for-christians> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maenad> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Acts 2:13-15 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. 1Cor 11:21-22 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Mark 5:15 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Romans 12:2 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)