

The Song We Sing

Congregational meetings are always an interesting time.

They are not a fool-proof way of either hearing God's voice or leading a church, but they have an important place and contribution in discerning who we are and what we're on about.

So thank you to those who were able to make it and contribute and also to those who may or may not have made it to the meeting but have been praying for the church and the Board at this time as we make some very important decisions for GVC.

Personally I was encouraged by the meeting, although the amount of sleep I got following it would seem to indicate otherwise!

One of the things that happens in such a meeting is that people express a variety of opinions, and it often feels that we are all over the shop and not making our way forward. However there is more to the purpose of the meeting than coming to a unified conclusion. One of those things is that it is important that people have the opportunity to have their say. That is also why we met and talked about things in small groups. Some people are stronger in the open larger format and some people who have very valuable things to say often don't unless it's in smaller more regulated situation and perhaps when they are asked specifically.

So a meeting such as the other night gives everyone an opportunity to have their say, it also gives the Board an opportunity to hear, because any Board that thinks they have the soul handle on what God is saying and doing is deceived. Boards and elders and other leadership groups certainly are there to lead, but leadership is primarily a servanthood function and therefore a meeting like last Wednesday night where the Board was willing to be open and led by the Spirit and by the congregation, and vulnerable, are important things that need to be given opportunity in the life of the Church in different ways, and the meeting was one of those ways.

The final thing I want to say about the meeting is that although it was a single event, it is also a part of the process. This is a process that has been going on for a number of months with the board as a group discussing and praying about the church's future and the chain of decisions that need to be made and have been put into effect by the fact that our lease is coming to an end in this building. Not only does the board pray about that as a group but individually we're been involved in much prayer also, as I know some of you have been.

In a process things happen step-by-step. Wednesday's meeting was an important step in the process, and what adds to its importance is that now that it has happened it enables further steps to unfold. Already since the meeting God has spoken to me personally very clearly about certain things that speak into our decisions, and it clearly wasn't going to happen until the meeting had taken place.

So leaving the meeting sign aside for now let me say this.

Regardless of whether we continue to meet here, or there, or everywhere (not really sure what that means but it just seemed to fit that here or there) the essence of who we are and what God asks of us, doesn't change.

Our song is still the same.

The Song we Sing (heading)

Let me give you some broad brush strokes of what our song is. What is the song the Geelong Vineyard church is to sing as we enter it into 2019?

A Hymn of Praise and Adoration

The first thing we want to do as God's people is to tell him that we love him and adore him and are in awe of him and the wonderful things he has done.

It is out of that place of intimacy with God that all else flows in our Christian walk. Mission and evangelism and compassion and servant wood and justice and everything else of course can come from our own choices and will and determination, but the best of it comes from our heart. A heart that knows the heart of Jesus, the heart of the King, beats best as we go about our Kingdom business.

When we adore Him, we end up laying our life down before Him.

Do you remember that song...

“ Jesus I adore you, lay my life before you, how I love you”

Then “Jesus we adore you, lay our lives before you, how we love you”

Then in a round:

Jesus we adore you, lay our lives before you, how we love you
Jesus we adore you, lay our lives before you, how we love you
Jesus we adore you, lay our lives before you, how we love you

Praise and adoration in worship is not just something that we value here at Geelong Vineyard, but it is also a part of our wider family value. Vineyard restored intimacy to the church's worship.

But worship is more than intimacy, as its name states “Worth-ship”.

Giving God his worth.

We praise him for who he is.

The Psalmist says it well.

Psalm 150

¹ *Praise the Lord.*

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty heavens.

² *Praise him for his acts of power;*

praise him for his surpassing greatness.

³ *Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,*

praise him with the harp and lyre,

⁴ *praise him with timbrel and dancing,*

praise him with the strings and pipe,

⁵ praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.
⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord.

The great high God, wonderful, almighty, gracious and good in every way.
True worship, the best worship is heartfelt declaration of the greatness of God.
And then we come along in intimacy and snuggle in to this amazing almighty God.

But as GVC sings the song the Lord has given us it is not just about singing songs.
For as we know worship is a whole of life activity.
We want our lives to honour God in all we do.

We want the worship of our lives to reflect our adoration of and intimacy with God in the world that we live in. That our individual and corporate life will be a song of adoration and praise and Thanksgiving to God in a world that often wants to look the other way.

A Family Melody

We want our life here at GVC to very much be a family melody.

A song sung together.

This song sing is so much more beautiful when we join and sing it together. We so miss, in this individualistic world that we live in, the value and beauty of being a corporate people of God that we are made to be.

You heard me say it before that we are primarily social beings rather than individuals. As revealed in the nature and the unity of the Trinity, life is meant to be lived together.

Just like our corporate worship in music and song reaches its height in community, so does our worship in the lives that we live reach its highest point when lived out together.

Marva Dawn says this:

As well as being strongly celebratory in nature biblical worship is also predominantly communal. When the Psalmist writes "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness" (Psalm 29:2), the verbs are all stated in the plural. God is deliberate about meeting with his people when they come together and delights to be enthroned on the praises of his people (Psalm 22:3). Marva Dawn states:

Do the people in our churches realise that almost all of the verbs that instruct God's people in the Bible are plural...How much difference it would make in our conversations about worship and in our being Church if we really understood that we are in this together!

We are called to be a people who love unconditionally in the world... and the first place of that unconditional love is meant to be the church.

This is reflected in the New testament by all the "one another" statements.
Talking about "one another" in the church.

Do you know how many “one another” statements there are?
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Here are a few examples:

Serve one another

Be patient with one another

Be kind and compassionate to one another

Forgiving one another

Submit to one another

Teach one another

Make your love increase and overflow for one another

Love one another

Love one another deeply, from the heart

Encourage each other

Praying for one another

Etc.

We sing with one another, and we sing to one another.

Sometimes our corporate song is a little off tune.
Like a birthday song in different keys.

But it is meant in the right spirit, and should be received willingly as such.

Refrain of Compassion

As we look out to the world, we do so with compassion.
That is not a patronising, or condescending compassion.
But a passion that cares, and wants the best for those about us who are in need.

It's the compassion God gives, from out of His very nature.

Look how he describes himself in Exodus 34:4-7

⁴ So Moses chiselled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the Lord had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. ⁵ Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

Jesus constantly acted out of compassion:

- When he saw the crowds he had compassion on them
- The feeding of the 5,000 was an act of compassion we are told
- He healed the two blind men because he had compassion on them

- And the very reason he embraces us is his compassionate love:

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)

He expects no less from us.

I don't get judgemental Christianity.

That calls down judgement on people performing and even receiving abortions.

Or on homosexuals.

Or whatever else.

The essence of Christianity is compassion, not judgement. It is the Father's job to judge. It is our role to love, and to heal the broken hearted, and to set free the oppressed, and to heal the broken and hurting, to proclaim good news to the poor and that this is the day (or year) of the Lord's favour.

Not tomorrow – today!

That's our song.

A Battle Cry

Much of what I have said in the Refrain of Compassion could go under this heading. Because our battle cry is against injustice, and oppression, and broken-ness.

But it is also a battle cry against the enemy.

1 Peter 5:8 says:

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Not only should we be alert, but we should recognise that the war is not yet over and that we need to act.

The death blow of the enemy was dealt on the cross,

But until Jesus comes again, while he is in the throes of death, the enemy still seeks to create havoc, and to take as many people with him.

We have full authority over him, and must not ignore him.

Neither should we go looking for him.

Our job is to get on with the work of the Kingdom.

Bringing life, and forgiveness and healing and justice and so on.

If we do that, we will see the enemy, and then we deal with it.

Don't go looking for it.

We also go into battle to “save souls”. Forgive the term.
An army needs to be deliberate about saving people.
We need to be deliberate about evangelism.

If we have 100 sheep, and 99 are safe and 1 is lost, where should our focus be.
On the lost one.

Luke 15:3-7

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

How does a church like us do evangelism?

By caring-	How are you? How are you really?
By servanthood-	Doing acts of love to our neighbour, or our community, repeatedly, steadfastly, faithfully, and filled with faith that God will honour our reaching out.
By power-	the power of love and a gentle spirit that I mentioned last week in 1 Corinthians 4
By power-	of the Kingdom presence to heal the sick and to cast out demons and to break strongholds on people’s lives
By inviting-	Why not try inviting someone to church? It probably won’t kill them. The roof probably won’t fall on their head. And it might just mean they find life. Eternal life. And people are often more willing than we think.

The final chorus of our song is this:

A Cry of Surrender

I think that most of you have agreed with pretty much all I have had to say this morning.
It's the doing of it that we find hard.
But doing the stuff is what we are called to do.
To be not just hearers of the word, but doers of the word.

In Romans 12:1 Paul encourages us like this:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

You have heard the old line, “the problem with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar”.

This morning I am calling us as a church to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, and to make it our determination not to crawl off the altar.

And that starts with you making that same commitment to God.

That I lay it all down for you Lord,

- For your purposes,
- For your people (in fact all people)
- And for your praise.

Bow heads and listen to "Surrender"

I invite you to make this song your prayer.