

LENT COURSE 2013 - BECOMING A CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS, A GROWING CHURCH

Introduction to why we are doing this Lent course.

The St. Martin's staff went away to Coolock House at Umzumbe on Wed 30th and Thurs 31st January 2013 to listen to God and to share with one another what they felt God might be saying to us as a church.

This Lent Course is the result of those 24 hours.

It was felt by our staff that God spoke to them quite clearly about the call for St. Martin's to become '**A Church Without Walls, a Growing Church**'.

'A Church Without Walls' was a phrase that Rob Taylor had introduced to St. Martin's a few years ago, and it was felt by our staff that this was how God was wanting us to approach our life together as His church in this locality at this time.

A Church Without Walls is a church that seeks (1.) to remove unnecessary barriers that may hinder people from being *attracted* into our church, and (2.) that becomes very intentional about *going* out to serve where people are in the world.

The many things that the staff felt they had heard from God were listed and those that seemed to be saying the same sort of thing were then grouped under headings. Someone then suggested that those headings could become the basis of a lent course of teachings to help us move towards becoming 'A Church Without Walls, a Growing Church'.

May God also speak to each of us as we listen to him during these weeks of Lent 2013.

Study One - GROWTH IS COMING

Comment on these sharings from our staff away time of listening to God:

- 'On a road well travelled expect the unexpected'
- 'Rising sea level is coming'
- 'Spirit break out - break our walls down'
- 'Church is a light don't be surprised when people are drawn'
- 'Why shouldn't we grow?'
- 'You see dry bones, God sees His army' (Ezek 37)
- 'Miraculous catch of 153 fish (John 21:3-6, 10-11), seems to symbolize the many different people who will be brought into God's Church.'
- 'Spread the knowledge of God, for indeed the knowledge of God will be spread until the promise is accomplished that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9) IE. We will win, so go for growth in evangelism.'

Bible Survey of God's promises of the numerical growth of His people.

(Share comments on these verses)

- That lots of people will come to God - Ps. 65:2
- That God's community will be too huge to number - Gen. 32:12
- Though at times God's saved will only be a remnant - Rom. 9:27
- In the End lots of people will be with God - Rev. 7:9-10
- Acts records the numerical growth of the Church with progressive progress reports – See if you can

find some of these reports in Acts.

Bible Study of Matthew 9:35-38

Read the passage and discuss these questions:

1. How do we see people outside the church?
2. Why is significant that Jesus saw "the crowds" as a plentiful "harvest"? (v36-37)
3. How might we come to see people outside the church as a "harvest"? (See John 4:35)
4. Jesus prayed for more workers to be sent to bring in God's harvest. What are these workers like? (Look at this passage for indications as to what the workers would do. Clue think of Jesus in this passage.)
5. Share how you feel about our Monday 6pm to 7.00pm prayer time. And share how you feel about our call to fast on Mondays. (Is this is one way we can pray more seriously for more workers to be sent.)
6. How do you feel about the possibility that God might call us to hold Sunday morning 8:30am services that make space for more healing ministry once a month, and maybe therefore don't include Communion?
7. How do you feel about the possibility that God might call us to alter our building to make it more accessible and attractive and adaptable and more of a community centre rather than just a worship area?

Prayer time.

Matthew 9:38 "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (NIV 2011)

Pray for all our members have a sense of mission, of being called by God to help bring in the harvest and help the church to grow.

Pray especially for leaders at St. Martin's.

- Pray for our Vestry meeting on Monday 25th Feb. at 7:30pm that God may guide the election of leaders who share our vision and values.
- Pray also for a visionary leadership.

Pray for our needed volunteers at many levels and in many areas - EG – YPC, Youth, Welcoming at Services, Readers and Prayers in Services, Musicians and Singers in the Worship Team, Small Group Leaders, Cup bearers at Communion, Lay Ministers, Ministry Team people.....

Study Two - GROWTH FROM DEEP ROOTS

Comment on these sharings from our staff away time of listening to God:

- 'Trees blown by the wind stand because the root system is strong'
- 'We do have strong roots'
- 'Bedrock of faith in God's control - God being in control'
- 'Job 42:5 - personal knowledge of God not just hearsay about God we have heard from others.'
- 'Isa. 46: 4 - God uses the older (and younger people as well - 1 Tim. 4:12)'
- 'When you are "I am"'

Deep Roots of St. Martin's

Try and quickly list some of the things you think are deep roots from which St. Martin's can draw spiritual life and growth.

Bible Study of Matthew 16:15-19

1. Changing the image in this passage from a building to a plant, who is the tap root of the Church? (v18a)
2. One of the branch roots of the Church that are found in this passage is a confessed faith (v16). How do we confess our faith in Jesus?
3. Another branch root of the Church is revelation from God (v17). How can we receive revelation from God today?
4. Yet a third branch root of the Church is victorious spiritual warfare (v18b). Share how the Church overcomes evil in your experience.
5. Binding and loosing is a difficult concept (v19). One thing it does show is that the Church has authority on earth to declare things that have been determined in heaven (See the NIV footnote on v19).

Comment on this quote about binding and loosing from the Quest Bible:

'We can bind and loose what the Lord has prohibited or permitted in Scripture (2Ti 3:16 – 17). To bind means to "forbid, refuse or prohibit;" to loose means to "permit or allow." Jesus intended that the apostles' inspired teaching should become the standard for our faith and practice. God also gives special wisdom and power to the church during times of earnest prayer (Mt 18:17 – 20).'

Prayer time

Use Psalm 1 and Ephesians 3:14-21 as prayers for your rootedness of group and of the church.

Study Three - GROWTH INVOLVES COMPASSION

Comment on these sharings from our staff away time of listening to God:

- 'Authority - love challenges'
- 'Don't worry heaven has a plan for you'
- 'Ephesians 4:1-4'

Read and comment on God's concern revealed in these Old Testament passages

- Exodus 2:23-25; 3:7-10 - God's concern for his people
- Jonah 4:11 - God's concern for all people

Bible Study of Matthew 9:36

1. The Greek translated "compassion" word is 'splangkhnid'-zom-ahee'. It means to have the bowels yearn, to feel sympathy, to pity, to have, or be moved with, compassion. Share how you might identify with this deep, 'gut level' sense of sympathy.
2. The objects of Jesus' compassion are "the crowds" (v36). How do we see and feel about people who are not yet in the church?

3. Analyze and comment on what the following descriptions of might reveal about the “crowd”:

- "Harassed"? (What might be attaching or troubling these people?)
- "Helpless"? (Do we see people who don't yet know Jesus as helpless even if successful in many other areas of life?)
- Leaderless - "like sheep without a shepherd" – (Do we recognize that people are lost and without spiritual direction until they are led by Christ?)

3. Think about the challenge of compassion in this verse. If we see people in the world in the compassionate way that Jesus sees them, how might we be and do church differently?

Prayer time.

Pray for a deeper 'gut level' sense of compassion for the lost people of this world.

Pray for God to show us how such compassion might be expressed in our way of doing church.

Study Four - GROWTH REQUIRES DOING SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Comment on these sharings from our staff away time of listening to God:

- 'The wind blows where it pleases (Jn 3) - My Spirit may take you in an unknown direction - He is uncontrollable, not comfortable or predictable. The Spirit is the pioneer of uncharted territory (for us).'
- 'Be in the world but not of the world.'
- 'March to the different drum beat of God.'
- 'Habakkuk 2:24'
- 'Romans 12:1-2'

Bible Study of John 21:1-6, 10-11

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: [2] Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. [3] "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. [4] Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. [5] He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. [6] He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.....(10) Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." [11] So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

1. Growth requires doing something different - If things haven't worked well. In verses 3-5, no fish were caught.

St. Martin's is far from being an unsuccessful church. It is big enough to feel satisfied with what it is currently doing. A trickle of people do join St. Martin's, and some even come to faith in Jesus Christ. But some feel that we are not growing as fast as God might want. Comment.

2. Comment on this statement attributed to Einstein: 'Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.' Could this say anything to us regarding the way things are being done at St. Martin's, especially related to our attempts to grow in numbers?

3. Growth requires doing something different - As directed by Jesus. We see an example of this in verse 6 and following.

Is there a lesson for us in this?

How might we hear Jesus directing us to do things?

3. Share thoughts on the possibility that we might be being directed to do some services differently to catch more 'fish'?

4. Share thoughts on the possibility that we might need to be doing things outside the church building to catch 'fish that won't swim into this building'?

Prayer time

Ask the Lord to show us what he wants us to be doing to 'catch more fish' and listen to what God might say.

March 17th-19th - GROWTH INVOLVES THE SUPERNATURAL POWER OF GOD

David Stansbury a minister from Port Elizabeth, who is well worth listening too, will be speaking at all our services on Sunday 17th March and he will also be doing some teaching on Monday 18th (for leaders) and Tuesday 19th (for the whole church and visitors).

For this reason, we are calling all our small groups to give up meeting during this week so that all our people can get to the meetings with David.

Study Five - GROWTH IS DIFFICULT BUT DON'T DODGE IT

Comment on these sharings from our staff away time of listening to God:

'Detour - unfamiliar - stand firm, do not fear - snake? (Satanic opposition?)'

'Growth is not always comfortable - be willing'

'Be- ing not do- ing'

'Walking on water'

'Jesus asleep in the boat in a storm'

'Be deep and wide - keep values and also change things'

'Fire lots of bullets and see which sticks (hits)'

'Expect growing pains'

'Churches are unique - comparison leads to pride or envy'

Consider how Jesus set his face towards the Cross

On Palm Sunday, we think of how Jesus rode into Jerusalem and towards the Cross. Difficult as it was, he would not dodge going to die for the sins of the world. For that was the only way for the Church to be saved and to grow.

Try to list from your memory of Holy Week (the week before the Cross) what Jesus did to prepare for the Cross.

Are there lessons we can learn as we have to face the difficulties of change and growth?

Bible study of Matthew 14:25-33

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. [26] When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. [27] But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." [28] "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." [29] "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. [30] But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" [31] Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" [32] And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. [33] Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Note some of the factors that make growth difficult but excitingly possible that are evident in this incident:

1. The fear factor (v25-27)

- Why might unusual things, and especially displays of the power of God, make us afraid?
- When it comes to growth at St. Martin's, are there things you might fear God will do?
- Is there any comfort in realizing that Jesus is here and that growth is His work?

2. The risk factor - v28-29

- 'To walk on water, you have to get out of the boat'. Are there risks we will have to take for growth?
- If Jesus is calling you / us to come to Him outside the 'boat' (of the comfortable), what might getting out of the 'boat' mean for you / us?

3. The faith factor – v29-31

- Peter walked supernaturally on the water by faith and sank as his faith waivered. How might our faith be expressed as we step out and do risky things for the growth of the church?

4. The Jesus factor - v31-32

- How might the protecting presence of Jesus be a comfort as we take risks for God?

5. The worship factor - v33

- Take a few moments to join together in worship of Jesus "the Son of God". Truly He is awesome and its all for Him!