

Invitational Church – Interesting & Invitational

We have started a series on how to develop an invitational culture in the church. Last week I mentioned that firstly we should be interesting people.

Have you noticed that church can sometimes be an unfriendly and hostile place and its not because people are like that but they do t think how a new person will feel in a new environment . what's it like for a new person coming into church.

We who have been in church for a while or who have grown up in church are used to what we see and do. People coming here see a different environment to the traditional ones, we don't wear robes or a collar, we sing modern songs.

We had one person recently who said that what we did here was refreshing and energising and different that he wanted to come again. Now that's a great report from an outsider!

In the Uk if we ask an average person do you go to church? Answer: they would refer to an event on a Sunday or what they see on TV or refer to the traditional church. We know that church is much more than that.

People have different expectations of church. difficult stereo types to deal with in peoples head and they struggle with these things . Some would relate it to Vicar of Dibley, Father Ted.

Therefore it is important to think this through as a church as to how new people would feel in our environment. What's it like for that person that very first time where they don't know what to expect.

So in order to develop and invitational culture in church we have to design a Sunday service which is one event in the calendar life of the church and so we have designed something that is comfortable for the new person coming where you can confidently bring a friend, colleague to church and not be worried about weird stuff happening!

The Our Sunday Service is designed as a tasty meal for the new person where they want more of that. It does not have everything. Yes we don't pray long prayers or we don't do long sermons etc because this service is designed to reach out to those who are looking for somewhere they can connect.

We do long prayers and bible study on a Wednesday and that's a different meal we offer which is geared towards those who feel they are connected to the church family and want to shoulder the burden of the ministry and pray with us and stand with us.

That's a meeting where we encourage the gifts of the Holy spirit and so if someone has a word we welcome it. We welcome prayer requests and any burden you are carrying for prayer. We welcome people to lead a Wednesday. come and share on Wednesday.

Jesus in public always prayed **short** prayers because He wanted to honour God in what He did. We don't need long prayers... Especially on a Sunday... to impress God. He is already impressed with us anyway! We keep things short and to the point. Can you see that?

So Sunday is a window which is designed for an hour and 30 mins to help people to come and honour God and have a glimpse of what church is like. It is not the totality of church life . It is a window that gives someone a picture of what church is like and eventually they want to get involved in the life of the church and come again and again.

You look at a shop window of a big store and it is lovely isn't it? You then decide to go in because of what you see in the window. The window does not show you everything that that big store sells. So Sunday is a window that is attractive to enable people to come and see what its like, check out who we are and what we are like..... not too weird !

Is 1:18 come now let us reason together (chat together)

God speaks here to the nation of Israel... lets talk - oh God what have i done! It's like headmaster calling you to his office. or your boss calling you for a meeting - what have I done wrong and usually you are anticipating what would happen and you get anxious!

God is anticipating their anxiety and wanting to reduce it by telling them the outcome of the meeting. God is saying I want to talk to you but I want you know the out come of this conversation - **Isaiah 1:18** *"I, the Lord, am the one speaking to you. Come, let's discuss this. Even if your sins are as dark as red dye, that stain can be removed and you will be as pure as wool that is as white as snow.*

Gods says to Israel, come let us reason together or chat or discuss this, but before we speak I want you to know the out come and He says even if your sins are dark as red dye, those stains can be removed... Its a bit like this , if someone wants to talks to me about something and he tells me "Sam, it's going to be ok, I already have a solution to the problem" Would this not reduce all the anxiety and the stress levels of wanting to meet this person.

Imagine if we had an invitational church where we could tell visitors the outcome of how we do things, that we will have 4 songs, there will be a welcome, some people might raise their hands and clap but you don't have to, we have a time for giving with no strings attached or no coercing to give, at the end of the message there will be an opportunity to respond but you don't have to, we serve great food and coffee where you can meet others... Would it not be great to tell a new person we bring to church the outcome and what they can expect and so reduce that anxiety they may be having?

I would like to encourage you that as you journey in the faith, your testimony and you meet various people that you can say to them " I'd love you to come to this meeting but its a window into my world of faith, its not the whole thing but its a window into my world" If we going to be an invitational church: **we have got to invite people !!!**

John 1:40-46 Here Andrew finds Peter and brings him to Jesus , He was intentional in inviting him to meet Jesus because he wanted Peter to find what he found. As soon as Peter comes Jesus gives him a prophetic word very naturally and calmly, declaring his destiny in his life.... how amazing is that!

The next day Jesus finds Philip who is from the same city as Andrew and Peter and invites Philip to follow Him, then Philip finds Nathaniel and invites him to come and see Jesus of Nazareth! when Nathaniel comments on can anything good come out of Nazareth, Philip tells him to **'Come and See'** .

Lots of people are finding Jesus in different ways. Sometimes it could be a person who finds Jesus through an invitation and sometimes it can be Jesus finding that person. Nathaniel is not a man of faith, he is cynical (can anything good come ...) there was no pretence with Nathaniel, he was outspoken and that's why Jesus said behold an Israelite in whom is no deceit! Philip just gives Nathaniel an invitation, come and see.

Some things in life just have to be experienced . No amount of talking will do. Often your experience would be different to my understanding you may have had about something.

When you experience flying a small Cessna plane it is so different to reading about flying it. The experience puts a different meaning to the activity.

An invitational church is less concerned about arguing people into the church or kingdom of God and more about creating opportunities for people to experience God and the kingdom. SO let's be that invitational church! We know that invitations can happen at all levels, informally, formally where you say yes or no , informal - if anyone wants to come they can and whether formal or informal we all make decisions and choices about whether we will go to or not.

How valuable do you feel when you get an invitation to something? Don't you feel special when you are invited?

Often we make excuses for other people, which sometimes stops us from extending that invitation because we assume they are busy!

You would not know until you invite them. When an invitation is given you can either say Yes or No. Usually it is the busy people who say yes! Never make an excuse for some one else by assuming their business. Always invite and never be afraid to do so. You never know the answer may be Yes! Tell them what its like and how exciting it is.

So ask, never presume. **DARE TO ASK... DARE TO INVITE.** We have to make room for the people who have not yet experienced Jesus who have not yet known the love of God. Come and see its just an invitation.

How many times have we gone to a different restaurant with a friend to try out something new just because they had invited us? Church can be like this too where we

invite people to come and see what we have, experience something new and ask them what they think about our church. It does not matter if people don't come to faith at the first meeting. We are on a journey not on a 100 meters dash. we want an environment and a culture where people say “ I like what you do and I am coming back” and i know that by coming again and again the Holy Spirit will bring them to Jesus.

It is a process, a journey. No rush. God has a way of bringing everybody into His Kingdom.

We always want to give space and time to people and love for people. Being in Gods presence will change people. Can we be an invitational church and start inviting people?