

## Declare his glory among the nations

Series: On a Mission from God

Date: 2 March 2025

Location: St George's Battery Point

Readings: Psalm 96; 1 Peter 2:1-10; 1 Corinthians 14:23-26

Novelist Nikki Gemmell, author of the racy *Bride Stripped Bare*, and now regular columnist for *The Australian*, was perhaps an unlikely convert to the Christian faith. After a time working as a presenter for Triple J, she moved to London where she read news for the BBC and worked on her novels. While there she and her husband “discovered the solace of Evensong”. The combination of prayers, Bible readings, psalms and choral music had a profound effect. “It completely stilled me and brought me to an experience of calm”, she writes. Later she went to another more contemporary church. “We went along because an Aussie friend was having a child christened there, and we were so taken, we’ve gone there ever since.”<sup>1</sup> Now, this story is over 20 years old. I don’t know where Nikki Gemmell is up to in terms of faith. But I share this story because it speaks to the impact the ordinary Sunday church service can have on people encountering Jesus and finding life in his name.

This is our final sermon in our series *On a Mission from God*. We’ve been looking at God’s mission in this world that he be known and worshiped. At St George’s we speak about it like this. Our mission is to see people *Drawn to the Light of Christ, Transformed by the Light of Christ and Sent out to Shine the Light of Christ*. We’ve looked at different ways which each one of us can participate in and contribute to God’s mission: Through our prayers; through our generous giving to God’s work; through loving our neighbours, being salt and light, doing all the good God has created us to do; and through our gracious witness - giving reasons for the hope we have in Jesus when people ask. Today we’re looking at how our Corporate Worship, what we do when we come together as the church on a Sunday, contributes to God’s mission.

We put on 4 big events through the year where we deliberately invite our neighbours in Battery Point to join us: Pancakes (on Tuesday), Easter, the Henry Baldwin lecture and Christmas. But I can tell you more people join St George’s through coming on an ordinary Sunday, than any special events that we do. Our building stands as a beacon of hope over the city. It invites people to church every week. You may be one of those people. Welcome! We’re so glad you’re here today.

As well as being for us as Christians, what we do on a Sunday in church is also very much for those who don’t yet know Christ. And our weekly Sunday worship can have a powerful effect. So this morning I wanted to look at 3 questions.

- What do we do on Sunday at church?
- Why is church so powerful?
- How can we share in God’s mission through Sunday church?

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<sup>1</sup> Quote in John Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, Zondervan, 2010: 155-156

### **What do we do on Sunday at church?**

On one level this question has an easy answer. We come together. We pray to God. We sing songs. We read the Bible. We hear a sermon. We share in the Lord's Supper. We have Kids Church. We have a coffee and a chat after the service. That's a description of what we do. But what is the spiritual significance of these things? You could say, what is the big picture of what we do?

We began this series looking at Psalm 96, where God invites his people to join all creation in singing praise to him.

Sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.  
**2** Sing to the LORD, praise his name;  
proclaim his salvation day after day.

Notice we sing praises to God and we also tell the story of his salvation. That is the great things that he has done to rescue a people for himself, culminating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This is what we do when we come together as God's people on a Sunday. We come together to worship him.

Now I know there is debate in some circles about calling what we do in church on a Sunday worship. Yes, we are to worship God in every part of our lives and in all that we do. One of the Sending Out prayers that we often say at the end of our service is: "Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work for your praise and glory." That's taken from Romans 12:1, where Paul urges us to "offer our bodies as a living sacrifice" and that this is our "spiritual worship". And that's what we want for everyone as they leave church, to love and serve God in his world as we are sent out. Nevertheless, there is something different about when we come together as God's people in "corporate worship". And we'll come to this in a moment.

But did you see how the Psalm continues?

**3** Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvellous deeds among all peoples.

How is it that the Psalm expects God's people to declare God's glory among the nations? Well, this verse builds on verses 1 and 2 - through their songs of praise. That is, through their corporate worship. There is an expectation here that when God's people gather to worship him, there will be others watching on. This was the case for ancient Israel even through to Jesus' day where the temple had a special outside courtyard, "the court of the nations", for non Jews to take part in Israel's praise of God. It was the same for the early church. In our reading from 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul's words expect that "unbelievers or inquirers"<sup>2</sup> will be present in the Sunday gathering when believers in Christ come together for worship.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 14.24

And did you notice how our reading from 1 Peter picks up the same theme from the Psalm? This is how the apostle Peter describes the church.

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”<sup>3</sup> The church might not look very spectacular. It may be full of failure and foibles. It may be all too human. But nevertheless, this is who God declares it to be. His chosen people. A royal people. A holy nation. God’s special possession. In Jesus God has made a new people, rescuing them from darkness and bringing them into his wonderful light. And what is our response to be? Worship. To declare his praises.

So we come together on a Sunday for corporate worship - that word corporate means “body”. The body here is us as the church, that is *the body of Christ*. And it’s why we call what we do on a Sunday a “service”, because that is another word for worship. We are together, serving or worshipping God. And the Bible expects we will have visitors who may be “unbelievers and inquirers” to use Paul’s terms.

### **But Why is church so powerful?**

The answer is, because God is present in church.

Psalm 22.3 says, “You are the Holy One, enthroned on the praises of Israel”. It’s an extraordinary picture. That the Holy One, God himself, that his royal throne is the praises of his people.

Changing the picture from that of a royal court to a temple, in 1 Corinthians 3 we read “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?”<sup>4</sup> And our reading from 1 Peter 2 we fleshes this out. “As you come to him [Jesus], the living stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

This is what we get to see when we gather together as the church: We see God’s temple, where each of us are living stones. We see the place where God lives by his Spirit. We each get to act as priests offering the sacrifice of our praise to God. And we know he receives this sacrifice with joy because we come to worship him through our great high priest, Jesus himself, who is present with us by the Holy Spirit. As our Lord himself said, “where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”<sup>6</sup>

When we gather together in the name of Jesus to worship our God and Father, we gather as the temple where God dwells by his Spirit. We enter the holy of holies, through our great

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 2.9

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 3.16

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 2.4-5

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 18.20

high priest, and offer the sacrifice of our praise to God. We enter into the throneroom of grace, and enthrone our God through our praises.

Why is church powerful? Because here, right now, we are before God's throne. We are here, in his temple. And he is here with us and among us. And when we lift our voices to praise him, we are singing directly to him. When we pray, bringing our needs and the needs of our world before God, we are speaking to our Heavenly Father, here present, who delights to hear the prayers of children. When we hear the Scriptures and the sermon, we are hearing God speak to us, right now, by his Spirit. When we come to the table, it is the Lord himself who feeds us from his heavenly banquet with his grace.

Maybe, you're here and you're not yet a believer, but you've felt a peace that you can't explain. You've felt your heart strangely warmed. You've felt a lightness and a joy. Maybe you've shed tears. You've wondered what is going on? Let me tell you. You've been in the presence of God. He offers you his love and forgiveness in Jesus. He invites you to worship him. It's what you were made for.

We live in a world of accelerating conflict and polarization. In Ephesians Paul speaks about the great cultural and political polarization of the ancient world, the divide between Jews and non-Jews or Gentiles, that God is in the business of undoing in Jesus. He writes:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, **15** by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, **16** and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.<sup>7</sup>

That making of one new reconciled and redeemed humanity, through Christ, we get to see made visible and concrete in the flesh and blood community of the church as we meet together as the body of Christ. It's why I love seeing all of you at church, in all our diversity, young and old, men and women, rich and poor, from all kinds of different backgrounds, cultures, languages, life experiences. I love hearing how people are going, living out their faith, learning to love God and love their neighbours. I love seeing what God is doing in people's lives. In the Apostle's Creed we say we believe in the *communion of saints*. This is what we mean - the church, that people amongst whom God is at work by his Spirit.

Now all of this is not necessarily flashy. We want church on Sunday to be our highlight of the week. Everyone gives of their best in contributing to our worship on Sunday. But we're all imperfect people. And yet, we are those amongst whom God delights to dwell by his Spirit. And we come to our heavenly Father through the grace of his Son. This is why Church is powerful, because God is really here. So if you want to experience God, come to church! If you want to experience God, worship him!

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<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 4.14-16

### **How can you participate in God's mission through church on a Sunday?**

As we've seen, both the Old and New Testaments expect that when God's people gather for worship, that there will be visitors present. As such our ordinary Sunday worship becomes a powerful means by which people hear and see the Good News of Jesus lived out, and are drawn to worship God themselves. This means three things for us.

First, **come** and worship yourself. Make church on Sunday the anchor and cornerstone of your week. Second, **invite** people to church. Church is the most powerful way your friends and family can experience God. Third, **welcome** new people at church.

We are blessed with the most gorgeous building at St George's. It stands as a beacon of hope over our city. Our tower invites people to church all day, every day. And I can tell you we always have visitors, every Sunday. So even if you don't invite people to church, you can welcome those who are new. This is why we have regular morning teas and lunches, so that we can extend that hospitable welcome to new folk. It's part of what our Bible Study groups are about, being places where we can get to know a smaller group of people on a more intimate level. But it's personal as well. I would love for every person at church to be prepared to make room in your life for new friends you welcome at church. Have a coffee. Invite people over. Spend time. Share your life. See God at work.

It's a powerful combination. Experiencing the presence of God in corporate worship, and then experiencing the love of God in the welcome of his people. And through that encounter people finding life in Jesus name. And you can be part of that, as you come to church on a Sunday. It's gentle. It's ordinary. It's electrifying.

- 1 Sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the LORD, praise his name;  
proclaim his salvation day after day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvellous deeds among all peoples.
- 4 For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;  
he is to be feared above all gods.