

EXPERIENCING FAITH

Jim Purves

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Preface

2020 the year of #COVID-19, #Blacklivesmatter and #TikTok. We have seen the best and worst of the human experience during this time. For some it's been a time of a slower pace of life, celebrating our key workers, having more time with our kids and developing new culinary skills! For others the experience hasn't been as good. There has been grief, isolation, stress, anxiety and depression. Perhaps for most, our experience has fallen somewhere in the middle, and in the backdrop of this unique time is the nagging question. What is God saying to us? To His church, to His followers, To His creation?

We have had change enforced on us, normal service has not been able to continue and the challenge is, once this has passed.....Will it? Should it? Can it?

For decades now the church in Scotland has struggled to engage meaningfully with the new generations rising. We as the church are older, smaller and often at the fringes of the communities we meet in. When most of the population are looking for purpose, hope and peace in life, is the church visible enough for them to find us? And even more scary: will they find what they look for within our communities?

We are finding that being church online makes us visible to our communities. 'Real friends', family members and even 'Facebook friends' are connecting in different ways with our online gatherings. More people are hearing about Jesus than before lockdown and we are seeing people respond to His life transforming message. We are on a steep but exciting learning journey about rethinking what it is to be a visible witness to our community.

What do people find when they come into our church communities? We have developed many ways of being and gathering that, whilst rooted many years ago in something good, have become disconnected from their source and often exist simply as tradition. They become barriers to people meeting Jesus. Strange, unusual practices that bear little or no relevance to the lives people live. Our messages often speak of things that are disconnected from people's experiences and vocabularies.

Often many of us who profess Jesus as our Lord and Saviour also become victims of this way of being. We live in the agony of knowing there is so much more, but live with the reality of how things are currently. We claim intimacy with God but

find we are strangers to His Spirit. We can speak of hope without knowing it. We aspire for peace but live conflicted lives. We have faith for the small and controllable but hold cynicism for the future and all things new. But then.....

But then there is Jesus.

I do not know exactly what the church looks like going forward for future generations, in terms of how it meets; what a worship service looks like; what mission arises. But this I know with all my heart, it has to look like Jesus! It's time for the body to truly reflect its head. When our communities look for hope, purpose and peace we need them to SEE Jesus in our physical and online gatherings. More, however, we need to be communities that embody Jesus' ways and teachings so we may EXPERIENCE Jesus.

In the midst of the awful global pandemic we have been blessed with a 'reset'. You cannot reset something unless you break the form that it is currently in and put it back together in a new and better way. Just as a bone can fuse together in imperfect ways and needs re-broken so that it can be reset. So we as the church have had this break, we have a chance to reset in a new and beautiful way that better reflects our head. So we look like Jesus.

I commend Jim's book to you. I have loved working with him over a few years now and know that what he says and what he writes are not some whimsical notion. Rather they come from a deep conviction forged in prayer, contemplation and experience. We need to read and engage with this work not only because it will enrich us spiritually and be helpful to our churches. We need to engage with it because we need Jesus to be more visible and present in our communities so that people can find the truth, hope, peace and purpose that is only found in Christ alone.

Ali Laing
Next Generation Development Coordinator
Baptist Union of Scotland

General Introduction

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

2 Peter 1.3-4

This book sets out to explore the shape of what it might mean to develop a more effective pattern of Christian discipleship, within and among us as God’s people, which serves as a better witness to the world of God’s gracious love and purposes. It is designed for those who, like me, get confused at times, or just distracted. I seek to express something that is simple and memorable, through three focus points. These three focus points I have run with, in my heart, for some time now. I find them helpful to hold onto, in what I am thinking, doing and trying to achieve. I pray that you might do too.

In embarking on this project, I am still intentionally journeying as a disciple of Jesus Christ, forty years after commencing full-time, stipendiary Christian ministry. This journey has caused me to reflect at length on the nature of Christian discipleship. I realise that there is so much that I still do not know, so much that I do not fully understand. I am very conscious that I have not yet grown into what I will one day become; yet this is clear to me and has consistently been my anchor: Jesus Christ is a living person who can be personally met with by each of us, drawing us to Himself and, in so doing, bring us into the presence of our unseen, Heavenly Father. This is a truth and an experience that continues to fill me with gratitude and joy, again and again; and I recognise that it happens because of the special way that Jesus Christ pours out the Holy Spirit – who is the creative power at work in sustaining and filling the whole Cosmos - into my life in a way that can be so utterly exhilarating. Our three focus points serve as my memory aide, helping and challenging me, as I look to respond to and engage with this experienced reality of this One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The focus points converge upon Jesus Christ, in and through whom the One God reveals Himself, bringing us back to the call to

pursue Christian discipleship, wherein God embraces us with His compassion, faithfulness, patience and purposeful love.

In what follows we will explore, through our three focus points, implications arising from the way God has called and commissioned us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, continually reshaping and reforming our understanding, relationships and actions. These focus points are summed up in three words: Recall, Renounce and Refuel.

Recall carries a sense of urgency, in focusing on the substance of the message that Jesus and his apostles declared to people. It involves exploring how Jesus Christ is pivotal, in understanding both the identity that God calls each of us into and in grasping how God deals with our humanity. It comes from a Biblical Greek word, *anamnesis*. We find this message concentrated in the words, the works and the ways of Jesus Christ. We also find this message expressed and Jesus Christ testified to throughout the sixty six books that make up the Bible. It involves looking, then remembering. Again and again. Turning our attention to and digesting what we see and are confronted with in Jesus Christ. This is our first focus point. Recall.

Renounce is the specific way in which we are invited to respond to this message. It comes from a Biblical Greek word, *kenosis*. It represents what is involved, in embracing the self-emptying, the *kenosis*, found and modelled in Jesus Christ. This, for us as people living in an increasingly self-affirming culture, communicates something that is very counter-intuitive. Renouncing does not come easily to us at all; yet, as we will see, it is essential. This action, of decentralising from and surrendering self to God, is our second focus point. Renounce.

Refuel is our third focus point. It looks to the active power of the Holy Spirit, in the special way that this One God enabled and energised the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. It comes from another, Biblical Greek word, *anastasis*. It flows from the revelation that each of us can have an authentic, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who entered this world to be like us, as a human being, in every way that God designed us to be. This enabling by the Holy Spirit is meant to be transformative, for it is because of Jesus' resurrection that we can experience the same power at work in our humanity as was at work in Jesus' humanity. Refuel points us towards a future with God wherein the Holy Spirit, by whose powerful activity God sustains and refashions the entire Cosmos, enters into and fills us in a special way, changing and reshaping us. We will

describe this action of God, working upon us, as anastatic enabling and empowerment. Refuel.

Our 'three R's', shaping our identity. Recall, Renounce and Refuel. Lives taken hold of by God, transformed and conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. Discovering a new identity for ourselves. Anamnesis, Kenosis and Anastasis. A.K.A. Christian. This is what we now set out to explore. We will look at the significance of these focus points, in ways that touch every part of our life and witness. We begin by exploring a fuller sense of each of the focus points.

1. Recall / Anamnesis

Recall can be tedious. We are bombarded with new, fresh information every day, more than any other generation that has lived before us. Ready access to information technology means that we can experience and investigate so many new ideas and opinions. There's something exciting in that.

There is also something dangerous in it. We can easily become disorientated and lose a sense of direction. We need to hold to a focus on *who* we are, *where* we are going, *what* it is that we are seeking to achieve and *how* it is that we are looking to achieve it. Our journey of discipleship requires recall, recollection, remembering. It means that we must take our bearings from what is known to us, from the past as well as the present, in order to plot a course into the future.

Where we want to centre on Jesus Christ, we need to recall. We need to make use of the record and testimony that is there for us, in the Bible. There we read of Jesus, as Christians have recognised and come to know Him, from the time of the first disciples right up to the present. The Bible has proven to be the most influential book – or rather, collection of books - in the history of the world. In reading of God in the Bible, we realise how important recall is.

In **Luke 24**, when Jesus meets with two distressed disciples on the road to Emmaus after His crucifixion, we see that they were disorientated. The words of some women disciples, who had reported that Jesus was alive, had seemed like nonsense to the other disciples. Yet what Jesus did, in walking along with these two disciples, was to open an understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures to them – what we call the Old Testament – so that they could see how the whole of the

Bible, from its beginning, plots a course through human history to the coming of Jesus Christ.

In this process through history, the Bible records events that demonstrate what God is really like. In other words, Jesus took the two disciples on a journey, recalling what God had done in the past, seeing how He had planned for all that was happening in the present. Through recall, Jesus gave them renewed hope and faith. Jesus showed them how God had prepared for his coming into the world. It was through being helped to recall what God had done in the past, seeing how the plans, purposes and promises of God expressed in the Old Testament had come to find fulfilment in what occurred in Jesus Christ's life, ministry, death and resurrection, that the disciples were able to grasp the relationship that we are now able to enter into with the One God. They were reorientated to recall who they were, where they were going, what it was they were to achieve and how they might achieve it.

A vital key in this process of recall comes through looking at the life of Jesus Christ, as we find it narrated in the New Testament, recorded and written down by the first disciples and their followers. We get help in tracing how the Old Testament reveals a trajectory that carries through to Jesus Christ. It follows that meaningful engagement with both the New and the Old Testaments will bring us to a deeper appreciation of who Jesus Christ is, where he would lead us and how he would continue to accomplish God's purposes in and through our lives. Critically, the New Testament gives us a personal profile of Jesus Christ. It tells us about his life. It records for us his deeds and teachings. It explains the reasons for his death and resurrection. It shows us the impact and effect he had on the first disciples: the same sort of impact and effect that he has had on countless men, women and children for over two thousand years.

We need to recall that Jesus Christ has affected the lives of people who have been His disciples from when he walked upon the Earth; and recount how he affects the lives of people who travel with us, as his disciples today. Each of us has a story to tell. In telling that story, we can be amazed and encouraged to discover how the experience of Christians today readily matches the experience of successive generations of Christians, right back to the first disciples.

2. Renounce / Kenosis

Having looked into aspects of what Recall means to us, we will also explore the response that God looks for in us. Integral to the way that we are called to respond to Jesus Christ and the message that he brings is the practice of renunciation. We need to renounce self, in order to embrace Jesus Christ. This call to renounce should not, however, be mistaken as a call into personal negation. Rather, we will see that it is only through renouncing self that we can truly enter life in its fullness, in coming to participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. We will see how this perspective is supported both from the teaching of Jesus, as we find it in the four Gospels of the New Testament; and also from the writings of the apostles, as found in the letters and accounts that make up the remaining books of the New Testament. We will explore the importance of learning to renounce all that we would long and aspire to be of ourselves, independent or separated from the express will of God, in order to become effective disciples of Jesus Christ. We will investigate ways that, through acts of renunciation, we are better prepared to participate in the life God has for us, appreciate the hope that is offered to us and come into a fuller experience of faith and the sustaining power of divine love.

Renouncing prepares us for a fuller life and keener effectiveness. Yet renouncing is harder for those who have much, who carry a heavy burden of seeking to prove themselves or, perhaps paradoxically, who might feel comfortable with their present lot. It is less complicated for those who are disadvantaged or marginalised, possessing little or nothing, either in material comforts or personal prestige. Renunciation, however, is the response demanded by the message that Jesus Christ brings. A message of an immanent coming of the just and righteous rule of God over all people and places. A message of a transformed Cosmos. As we recall the Biblical witness, the practice of investing ourselves in God and His purposes requires that we renounce patterns, preferences and prejudices in life that are contrary to God's will and Jesus' way. This will be, for most of us, a long and often painful path, a journey that will last a lifetime. But it is in renouncing that we are liberated into a brighter hope, a deeper faith and a richer love.

For the thief on the Cross, next to Jesus at the time of his crucifixion, it was a journey that was reached in a moment. He had heard of Jesus. He knew something of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God. He had also heard that

Jesus had done no wrong. He knew fear of God in His heart. So when we read, in **Luke 23**, of his words to Jesus, “remember me when you come into your kingdom”, we see this man’s faith expressed by a renunciation of all he was and had done. He wanted to belong to Jesus.

Repentance and faith are words that are used to describe parts of this process. Key to an understanding of them both is this second focus point. Renounce.

3. Refuel / Anastasis

The reality of Jesus Christ’s resurrection punctuates all that the Gospel communicates. It gives sense to the Cross of Calvary and the death that Jesus willingly endured, expressing God’s mercy and effecting salvation for us. It also brings focus to our total dependency on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit entering into us with fresh intensity, enabling us to enact our Heavenly Father’s will and to walk along a path of authentic, Christian discipleship.

There is a natural tendency, in us all, to try and run on an empty tank or to veer off the road and into a ditch. Only the empowering presence of God the Holy Spirit can enable us to live a life that expresses the reality of Jesus Christ in us. An empowering presence, focussed upon and intensified through Jesus Christ’s own humanity. His glorified humanity acts as a prism, concentrating the activity of the Holy Spirit into our humanity in an encompassing, powerful way. The Holy Spirit is the Creator Spirit, sustaining and empowering all of life in the Cosmos.

At the same time, the Holy Spirit’s presence is specially focussed upon us through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit brings to birth and growth the new life that issues from the power of Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice and bodily resurrection. It is through this life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ that the Kingdom of God finds its expression among us, bearing the first fruits of a renewed Creation through a renewing of our humanity. We will often refer to this, in the chapters ahead, as anastatic empowerment. The possibility of our living as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ is released and enabled when we are refuelled by the Holy Spirit.

This third focus point helps us to make sense of the invitation to renounce, building on the invitation to recall. The whole process – Recall, Renounce, Refuel - fits us to know the presence and power of God in a fresher, fuller way. It is the

key to our being enabled to pursue the goals, engage in the practices and be formed with the virtues that characterise lives of fruitful discipleship in following Jesus Christ. This is our goal, our aim in embarking on this project. Let us go on, in what follows, to explore the application of these focus points together.

Part One

Tracing a Pattern

In starting by looking to the New Testament, we are seeking after an overview of how the need to Recall, Renounce and Refuel appears in the narratives of Holy Scripture. We will not attempt to expound an exhaustive selection of texts, nor are we suggesting that our three focus points be identified as dominant themes in each of the New Testament Books. Rather, we are looking to trace a pattern, to see where our three focus points can be identified within the Biblical texts. We will look to see how this dynamic process of Recall, Renounce and Refuel is woven into Biblical Books. We will note some ways in which this would affect us, in the pursuit of Christian discipleship. We will begin to explore the implications of Recall, Renounce and Refuel, in sampling passages that give us insight as to how we, in our time, might pursue the outworking of these focus points.

Chapter 1

Recall in the Gospels

What place has Recall, or *anamnesis*, in the four Gospels? The Gospel accounts are our primary source in recalling the life, ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ. While the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke – collectively referred to as the Synoptic Gospels - have much in common, because they each offer a synopsis or summary of the life of Jesus Christ, they differ in style and content from one another. There is clearly another approach, in the chronology, events and teachings recalled, in the Gospel of John. These variations remind us that different people recall different things, with different emphases. Each of the Gospel writers demonstrates a perspective that is coloured by their own response to Jesus Christ and what is memorable to the author. Such written accounts arose because of a desire to recall, to remember not only facts but impressions made. Also, these accounts are of a living person whom each of the writers knew to be alive now, following his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension into the Heavens. They had discovered that it is possible to meet with Jesus Christ in his ascended form, in a way that cannot be fully comprehended by us; but that can certainly be apprehended by us, through the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the Gospel accounts are not simply historical biographies. They are punctuated recollections that bring to our attention the character and the agenda, past and present, of Jesus Christ.

Where we will go on to trace a focus upon Renounce and Refuel in the Gospel accounts, our initial investigation begins with this primary focus of Recall. We look at four aspects to this, in how the Gospels begin; what it is that Jesus recalls; what it is that Jesus asks His disciples to recall; and what it is that the Gospel writers appear keen to emphasise, that their readers might notice and remember.

How the Gospels accounts begin

Each of the four Gospel accounts begin by inviting us to recall how the coming of Jesus Christ is set within a larger story of God's dealings with humanity from the beginning of time. Matthew starts with a genealogy, rooted in the person of

Abraham, traced in the lives of people that lived throughout the history of Israel. He also tells how foreigners, the Magi, came looking for the newly born King of Israel. Luke, while going on to recount Jesus' genealogy, begins with events immediately prior to the birth of Jesus, noting how they are rooted in God's promises, expressed through God's historic covenants with Israel. Luke also stresses how Jesus is recognised by prophetic witness, when presented at the Temple in Jerusalem. Both Matthew and Luke emphasise the line of Jesus' descent through David, the most famous King of Israel. Mark opens his account with a quotation from the prophet Isaiah, telling of the special presence of God's Holy Spirit with Jesus. John joins Mark in emphasising the power of Jesus, God's anointed deliverer of Israel, to baptise people with the Holy Spirit; but roots Jesus' identity earlier, before the rise of Israel and beyond the beginning of time in the birth of the Cosmos, as the One who is present as the eternal and active Word of God.

Each Gospel, albeit in different ways, not only identifies the special nature of Jesus Christ but locates him in a narrative, rendered in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The story stretches back to the beginnings of the World, forged by the creative action of the Holy Spirit, in conformity with God's Word. It invites us to gaze back to and before the birth of humanity to the mystery of the One God, who is the Creator of the Cosmos. At the outset, Jesus Christ is affirmed as the outcome and the fulfilment of all that is revealed and promised, in God's dealing with His Creation, critically focussed in God's covenant faithfulness to the descendants of Abraham, in the line of King David. God's purpose involves preparing and shaping a people to bring to birth the Saviour of the World, Jesus of Nazareth.

What it is that Jesus recalls

Luke tells how Jesus, after repudiating the devil's distracting temptations, roots his identity in a manifesto uttered in Nazareth, quoting the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (**Luke 4.18-19**). Mark, as with Matthew, notes reference to the promise of God's royal rule being realised in the world through the Messiah, God's specially anointed One – the Christ – a descendent of King David; recalling the opening words of Jesus' message: "'The time has come,' he

said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (**Mark 1.15**). This reference to God’s Kingdom appearing now, in the present time, highlights an understanding, shared throughout the Gospels, that God’s Kingdom is the dynamic expression of God’s rule and presence come to us in Jesus Christ. It also invites us to recognise that the coming of Jesus Christ is God’s antidote to Israel’s failure in faithfulness. God’s Kingdom presence is now expressed through Jesus Christ. This coming in Jesus is an intensification of God’s rule come upon Earth, the outcome of a process developed through Israel’s history as a people. It is the promised, fuller extension of David’s Kingdom, a Kingdom that according to God’s covenant would never fail (**2 Samuel 7.12**). From the outset of his ministry, Jesus Christ saw Himself as both the fulfiller and the fulfilment of God’s Word, recorded in the Old Testament. Jesus saw Himself as appointed to enact and release the presence and the power of the Kingdom of God upon Earth.

This emphasis on God’s Kingdom come among us, in and through Jesus Christ, is a recurrent theme throughout the Gospels. The teaching of Jesus is laced with talk of a present reality, yet to come with even greater intensity: the reality of the Kingdom of God, also referred to as the Kingdom of Heaven. Each of the Synoptic Gospels record Jesus teaching in parables, stories that invite us to recall the nature of this Kingdom. It is a Kingdom that comes among us through a richer, concentrated, enabling of the Holy Spirit, present and powerfully expressed in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Indeed, a stress on the enabling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, looked to and expected in the prophetic Books of the Old Testament, accompanies Jesus’ confidence that the essential requirements of God’s Law, as delivered to Moses at Sinai, can now come to find fulfilment in human life: a life brought to full and complete expression in Jesus’ own obedience to and fulfilment of the Law of God. Jesus brings recall and refreshed revelation of God our Creator, revealed in God’s dealings with and words to the people of Israel throughout their history. Jesus does this through emphasising the outworking of God’s will and the Father heart of God, the importance of holding a reverent attitude towards the Holy Spirit; pursuing relationships of forgiveness and justice in looking to the priorities of God, including care of the poor and oppressed, the foreigner, the widow and the orphan. The actions and words of Jesus bring the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures into focus and recapitulate what has been spoken of by God through the Law, the Prophets and the Writings that constitute the Old Testament.

Jesus read and understood the Old Testament Scriptures as calling and leading people to recognise him as their Redeemer and Saviour, their rightful King, descended from David. We noted, in our General Introduction, how the Resurrected Jesus explained the Scriptures to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Likewise, in John's Gospel, in His rebuke to His persecutors, Jesus says, "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me," (**John 5.39**), going on to challenge them, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me." (**John 5.46**).

What it is that Jesus calls His disciples to recall

Jesus, in teaching His disciples, recognised and emphasised the counter-intuitive nature of our engagement with the Kingdom of God. We do not recognise the Kingdom of God when we are blind to what it represents and would bring about. It was not obvious to the disciples what Jesus was saying, because what he invited them to recall was not normal for lives lived out in a manner that is disengaged from God. A life that is not ready to be centred on the One God and the outworking of His rule among people does not readily embrace the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Part of the difficulty is the manner of recall Jesus requires of his disciples: it involves rejecting religion as commonly practiced, as represented in the lives of the Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees. In the core teaching found in the Sermon of the Mount, in **Matthew 5-7**, Jesus advocates practices that appear antithetical to those commonly considered as religious. Jesus illumines a deeper meaning to the Mosaic Law, his teaching coming to a climax in calling the disciples to seek after God's reign in their lives, with longing and real expectancy of a personal visitation by God. Luke, in a parallel passage in **Luke 11**, emphasises that the Holy Spirit would come in a powerfully dynamic way, in response to a sincerely expressed longing for such an enabling.

This challenge, in tutoring the disciples in longing for a visitation by God to enable and empower them, was not easily resolved. Jesus called the disciples to a simplicity of lifestyle, one that involves dedication and commitment to living out God's will, in relationships and practices. Jesus' disciples were to act as conduits and instruments of God's blessing and transformation, expressed into the lives of people, as enacted in Jesus' own life. This call to minister in the

manner of Jesus is particularly highlighted in the Gospel of John, in Chapters 14-16. The disciples are reminded that their fruitfulness as disciples will be enabled through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, coming to be active and present in their lives in a very special way. The disciples are to constantly recall, as highlighted in the 'I am ...' sayings of Jesus Christ, that Jesus is the template, the pattern, the means and the realisation of how people enter into eternal life with God. The disciples are to grow in expressing and ministering, in their present experience, the purposeful presence and power of God's Kingdom upon Earth. Likewise, as people persecuted Jesus, his disciples must prepare themselves to experience the same: "I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember" (**John 16.4**).

The pattern Jesus calls his disciples to recall is himself. Through all that he expresses in his life, our pattern for proclaiming and sharing the good news of the Kingdom of God is to be found in Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, this is emphasised in Jesus' celebration of the Passover Meal, prior to his betrayal and the events of his passion. In taking the bread he declares, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (**Luke 22.19**). Here, the command to recall – *anamnesis* – is an invitation to recall Jesus and all he stands for and represents.

We will return to this point, when we look at Paul's understanding of Jesus in celebrating this Last Supper; but for now, notice that Jesus' command is not simply to remember his death, but to remember everything about him and what he represents. The taking of the bread and the wine is presented by Jesus as an invitation to his disciples, that they might take his body and blood to themselves: to identify themselves fully with him, as he brings to climactic expression the covenant faithfulness of God, in all that he represents and accomplishes, through to his death and subsequent resurrection.

What it is that the Gospel writers are keen to emphasise, for their readers to recall

At the heart of the Gospel accounts is the event of Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross of Calvary. The events surrounding the passion of Jesus Christ are central to each of the four Gospel writers. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is key in releasing the full saving, healing power of God's forgiveness and mercy into our lives. Yet it is not only the death of Jesus, for and on behalf of sinners, that we

are to recall. What we see surrounding and punctuating the death of Jesus is also important.

For Luke, the outworking and fulfilment of God's covenantal intent, expressed in and through the coming of Israel's Messiah, is integral to his extended, introductory narrative, telling of preparation for the birth of Jesus. The faithfulness of God to His covenant with Israel is emphasised. As Zechariah is recorded as celebrating, God's redeeming power is expressed where God, "has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us – to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham" (**Luke 1.69-73**). This theme of celebration is continued through Mary's song, together with Simeon's song and Anna's prophecy in the Temple in Jerusalem after Jesus' birth: Luke is keen for us to understand that the coming of Jesus is for the fulfilment and enabling of Israel's mandate, to bring revelation to the Gentiles and glory to Israel (**Luke 2.32**).

This fuller picture of Jesus' purpose and destiny is only realised, in the understanding of disciples and followers, when confronted with the undeniable experience of the resurrected Jesus, following his death on the Cross. Luke tells us of how, in coming to the empty tomb and seeing there the angelic beings, "In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: "The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again."' Then they remembered his words." (**Luke 24.5-8**). Likewise, John recalls that it was, "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken." (**John 2.22**). It was, "only after Jesus was glorified did they realise that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him." (**John 12.16**).

The focus of the Gospel writers is towards enabling us to see the event of the Cross and what was accomplished there, in terms of our redemption and salvation. Their focus is also on helping us to realise that what Jesus undertook, in order to break us out of the destructive bonds of a death-centred life, enables us to live in a way that continues to pursue the agenda of God's Kingdom, released and realised here on Earth. As we have seen, Matthew's narration of

the Magi's visit to the newly born infant also emphasised the continuity between Israel's calling and what Jesus would accomplish. The One appointed to realise and release Israel's destiny, to be a blessing to all peoples, would be the One who enables his disciples to go out among all nations (**Matthew 28.18-20**).

What of Mark's Gospel? Mark's Gospel is often considered to be the simplest, most basic account of the life of Jesus Christ. Therein we find a key to an aspect of Jesus' ministry, developed in all four Gospel accounts, that is sometimes overlooked. Mark features the importance of miracles of healing and deliverance in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus' death and resurrection expressed both atonement for sin and victory over the Satan. The Jesus of Mark's Gospel defeats the Devil and brings a manifestation and demonstration of who God is and what He would bring about in the world. The potency of this simple message, of what God would release in Jesus' name, should not escape us. The path to its realisation can only be well established in us, however, throughout an ongoing process of Recall, Renounce and Refuel.

Chapter 2

Renounce in the Gospels

Renounce. It sounds really negative, doesn't it? Kenosis isn't easily understood by us, because it's so counter-cultural for people who live in a consumer culture. Seldom does it occur to us that this might be a core component to experiencing faith. For people living in a self-centred culture, engaging with a focus on Renounce can sound negative. Destructive, even. Where faith is framed in terms of accepting the sheer grace and goodness of God, trusting in what Jesus has done for us and being affirmed in who and what we are, kenosis does not readily fit as an integral component. Yet, as we shall see, the practice of renouncing was central to the self-understanding of Jesus Christ, as he engaged with his calling from God. A call to kenosis is an integral part of the message he shared with his disciples. It's a message for those of us who, today, would be his disciples. It is the need to decentralise from self. An act of self-surrender that will, in fact, bring us into a deeper and richer experience of living.

We're now going to look at certain points, in the Gospel accounts, where kenosis is embraced and modelled by Jesus. We'll see how important it is, to Jesus, to renounce an identity based on status and preferment. We'll then go on to note implications this had for the teaching and relationship of Jesus towards his disciples, as recorded by the Gospel writers.

Renounce embraced and modelled by Jesus

The baptism of Jesus is recorded as his first, public demonstration of renouncing. The baptism of Jesus is the deliberate undertaking of a grown man, coming to John the Baptist to be baptised. People at that time were responding to a call to commit their lives to God, as God's people. Baptism meant renouncing all that would move our focus away, in the trajectory of life, from a path pleasing to God. Baptism was a way of renouncing a preference for convictions or practices incompatible with the Kingdom of God. Baptism was an expression of commitment to worship Israel's God and engage in a life belonging to Him. This is the baptism that Jesus entered into.

Baptism, for Jesus, was not the act of a sorrowful sinner. Sorrow, when we have done wrong, comes first. Baptism is something more, a conscious act of consecration and commitment. Baptism expressed Jesus' focus upon renouncing all that would tempt or lead him away from the outworking of the Kingdom of God, in and through God's purposefulness and power worked out in his life. This is highlighted in the process of temptation, by the Devil, that confronted Jesus immediately following his baptism. Was Jesus really going to pay the cost of focussing on the Kingdom of God? Yes. He resisted. His public ministry began.

This act of kenosis, in baptism, was not just a 'one off' moment for Jesus. His baptism was something that represented and signified a way of living that would continue throughout his life and ministry. It was there in his prayer life, a deeply important practice for him. Mark records (**Mark 1.35**) that Jesus rose early, before dawn, in order to go out and pray in a solitary place. From both Matthew's (**Matthew 6.9-13**) and Luke's (**Luke 11.2-4**) accounts of the Lord's Prayer we see that, for Jesus, prayer was an act of glorifying in his Father in Heaven, inviting God to bring the presence and the power of His rule upon the Earth.

Jesus knew that he was to serve, through his humanity, as the conduit or gateway of God's Kingdom rule being expressed on Earth. Jesus was very conscious of his mission as Israel's Messiah, anointed and called to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit (**Luke 4.16-21**). Jesus was committed, through kenosis, to undertake what the people of Israel, throughout their history, had failed to do: to act as the conduit of God's rule expressed into a fragile and failing world. In this way, Jesus redefined the Israel of God as those would recognise him and serve God's Kingdom purposes with him. Those who truly belong to Israel would be those who aligned themselves to Jesus' ministry, giving expression to the Kingdom of God breaking into the world.

Kenosis, for Jesus, was integral to the way he maintained a dynamic relationship with his Father in Heaven. In embracing and committing himself to kenosis, Jesus prepared himself to be affirmed, empowered and released into effective ministry by his heavenly Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' kenosis was not self-destructive. On the contrary, it enabled him to be prepared for life. It was an act of ongoing orientating and calibrating, attuned to his heavenly Father's will, sustaining him on a course that was utterly and compellingly

fulfilling. It was not self-negation: it was living in the awareness of his true identity, as Son of his Father in Heaven.

We can trace this in Matthew's Gospel. From the beginnings of Jesus ministry, following His baptism and temptation in the desert, where he had been faced with temptation to seek inappropriate proofs of God's love in personal provision, affirmation and riches, Jesus began to declare the need for people to renounce what was incompatible with the reign of God in their lives (**Matthew 4.17**). In calling the disciples to himself, Jesus' invitation was that they should follow him. Disciples should seek to be imitators of Jesus. The invitation was to be participants in doing; and not simply to be spectators in viewing what Jesus did. This is made clear in the discourse that follows, delivered to the disciples in Galilee, known as the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon is distinctive in that it sets out a pathway for both Jesus and the disciples. The convictions and practices that Jesus rehearses and requires are present in Jesus' own ministry. The convictions and practices of Jesus are what he looks for in disciples.

Implications of Renounce

In the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount, in **Matthew 5.3-12**, Jesus stresses the need for an attitude of discontent with the present order of things in the world. Jesus commends an attitude marked by poverty in spirit and a sense of mourning, with hunger for the justice of God to be expressed and established upon Earth. It is this conscious renunciation of complicity and satisfaction with the present order of things that prepares the way for the presence and practices of the Kingdom of Heaven to be expressed through our lives (**Matthew 5.13-16**). Embracing this might well lead to disciples experiencing rejection and persecution; yet, by pursuing this way, identifying with Jesus and his mission, the disciples are invited to participate in bringing about the true fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament (**Matthew 5.17-20**). The implications of identifying with Jesus, replicating and repeating a pattern of life and ministry that is punctuated by kenosis, continues through the teaching of Jesus as recorded in Matthew, stressing that following Jesus involves renouncing pressures to conform to prevailing societal norms (**Matthew 8.18-22**).

Jesus' focus on kenosis, prioritising engagement with the Kingdom of God, embraces every aspect of life and relationships that we might seek to establish

with other people. It is not that Jesus looks to deny the importance of forging and establishing relationships with people. As we will come to see, engagement in kenosis should enhance and not diminish the quality of relationship that we have with other people. Any circumstance or relationship that is in danger of usurping the priority of pursuing his heavenly Father's will and doing what God wants – including Jesus' relationships with his closest family – must, for Jesus, take second place (**Matthew 12.46-49**). A fascinating example occurs in Jesus' reaction to Simon Peter's recognition and confession of him, as Israel's Messiah, at Caesarea Philippi. Why does Jesus appear so aggressive in his rebuke of Peter? An answer may be found in Jesus declaring, "You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns" (**Matthew 16.23**).

Peter's complaint carries the potential of distracting Jesus: it is a cry that invites Jesus to abandon a path of consecration, preferring his own comfort and protection instead. Jesus had just told the disciples, for the first time, of something they would find really difficult to grasp: that a path of fellowship with God, in the outworking of God's will in his life, would take Jesus on a journey that would lead into inevitable suffering. We shall return to this when we later look at the place of suffering in the Christian life. For now, it is enough to note that the path of kenosis is not an easy one to follow. Neither Jesus nor we ourselves find it easy to renounce what might appear, by the world's standards, to be a secure and attractive lifestyle. Fools' gold.

This stress, on renouncing self interest and submitting to our Father in Heaven, is highlighted in **Matthew 18.1-4**, when Jesus introduces the example of a child. A child is dependent upon their parent's care and attention. So it must be for Jesus' disciples. Attention and focus should be on our Heavenly Father's will outworked in the lives of His children. Our primary quest is in positioning ourselves in Jesus' relation of attentive listening to our Father in Heaven's pleasure and will. Likewise, in dealing with a mother's request for the preferment of her sons, Jesus emphasises that his way is a way of service and self-sacrifice; and that those who seek to identify closely with him should be prepared to follow his pattern of life (**Matthew 20.20-27**). A willingness to renounce all that conflicts with our Father in Heaven's will is Jesus' way.

Jesus placed his own understanding of this relationship of devotion and identity in sharp contrast to that of the sterile and directionless religiosity of the teachers of the Law and Pharisees, whom he so forcefully denounces throughout

Matthew 23. True devotion to God compels attentiveness to the present empowerment of God, as we journey in a world that is bruised and broken, oppressed by alien powers and principalities that, without God's presence and power full and overflowing in our lives, our humanity cannot overcome. This sojourn upon Earth demands an attentiveness to Father, whereby our focus and engagement in life with God will give rise to practices that demonstrate our fidelity to the reign of God in our personal lives. This demonstration of fidelity is prepared for through a life that makes space for the Kingdom of God, radiating through our lives.

It is in this act, of establishing 'a hole for God to fill', that we might best see a connection, for Jesus, in relating prayer to fasting. Jesus rigorously rebukes an understanding of fasting that seeks to attract or earn merit before God: there is no merit to be earned before the One God of infinite grace and mercy. All that we can offer is an expression of our need of His forgiving and reconciling presence, power and purposefulness outworked through our lives. This is the model, the paradigm, that Jesus presents to us.

The whole of Jesus's life, from the enfleshment of Incarnation to the pain of his passion – from the cradle of a baby to the crucifixion of a mature man – is an act of seed-planting. It is a life of fully enacted kenosis, preparing the way for the anastatic empowering of the Holy Spirit, enabling Jesus to fulfil his ministry as the Christ; and also preparing the way for a further filling of the Holy Spirit in our humanity, enabled and released through his bodily resurrection and ascension.

Such an understanding of the life of Jesus, bringing to humanity a taste and anticipation of the future fullness of the Kingdom of God, is profoundly expressed in the presentation of Jesus' teaching found in John's Gospel. From the pivotal declaration of **John 1.14**, that God's, "Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us", we see that both our relationship to God and to others is rooted in Jesus' kenotic act.

Jesus emphasises the importance of rooting ourselves in the will and direction of God, presenting himself as the gateway into a place of fruitfulness and productivity in life. Jesus' declaration to the disciples that, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about" (**John 4.32**), highlights his ongoing prioritising of dependency upon his Father in Heaven and all that his Father commands and leads him to do. In **John 5.19**, Jesus emphasises his commitment to doing only what he sees his Father doing; in fact, emphasising his inability to do anything other.

In this regard, Jesus' exemplifying of a grain of wheat's fruitfulness in saying, "Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (**John 12.24**), exemplifies and is typical of his understanding of a person's proper relationship to the One God and to others. This pericope highlights the participatory interaction that Jesus perceives as necessary, in our humanity's meeting and engagement with God. The interface between Father and Son, Son and disciples and the dynamic movement in all of that, communion with the Holy Spirit: all of this is connected by this kenotic emphasis, where kenosis is a necessary part of a dynamic that is counterbalanced by anastasis. Without kenosis there is no anastasis. Without Renounce there is no Refuel.

Jesus' emphasis, on this costliness of life as a disciple embarking on the path to eternal life, is one that we can sometimes miss in our desire to stress the unmerited favour of God towards us, expressed in and through Christ's sacrifice. God's salvation is, indeed, a gift to us. This call to renounce, the call to kenosis, is integrally part of this gift. It is an opportunity to renounce the oppression of all that would defile and destroy the beauty of God's likeness within us. A failure to emphasise the proper nature of our response to God's unconditional love, grounded in kenosis, can rob the disciple of a necessary preparation for the energising and refuelling work of the Holy Spirit, lifting and equipping us in the power that enabled Jesus Christ's resurrection. There is a qualitative difference between coming to a first awareness of the grace and mercy of God in Christ; and then counting the cost of abiding in Christ. This constraining need to come to Jesus, then counting the cost of doing so in order that we might be taken up in participation in the love of God for others, is a repeated theme in the Gospel accounts.

In John's Gospel, the Last Supper narrative focuses not on practical preparation for the meal, but on the need to join ourselves to Jesus, in acts of self-abasing service to others. The authenticity of Jesus' divinity is manifested and expressed in this pursuit of kenosis, reaching far into the depths of his humanity. The Word of God's complete inhabitation of all that we are manifests and brings to fulfilment the maturation of his humanity. Jesus, through his kenotic lifestyle, shows us what we were created to be: fashioned to bear the Image and Likeness of God.

This theme is found not only in Matthew and John. In Luke the narrative on the cost of discipleship, expressed in **Luke 14.25-34**, emphasises that the radical

nature of turning to and belonging to Jesus requires self-renunciation. Jesus presents salvation to us as a participative journey which he calls us into. In order to enter into a ministry that is authentically enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we first need to follow the path of kenosis. In this way, we are prepared for the embrace of God that refuels and enables us in the power of Jesus' resurrection, through anastatic empowering.

Renounce and the Sovereignty of God

It would be wrong to conclude from all that we have rehearsed that kenosis is something that we enter into, that we might be true worshippers of the One God, in our own strength. Salvation is an act of God's grace, from beginning to end. The life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ demonstrates this. Our call to kenosis does not precede Jesus' enactment of it. The path of all that we should undertake has been forged and cleared by our God and Saviour, as he has worked out that path for us, in and through his own humanity. Kenosis, as expressed in the life of Jesus and in his calling to us, is a manifestation of the sovereignty of God and the holiness of His ways. It is God's invitation for us to establish our identity by looking outside ourselves to another: Jesus.

Chapter 3

Refuel in the Gospels

Oil and water do not mix well. Neither does the endowment of the Holy Spirit, refuelling an unholy humanity with God's holy presence and power. The glorious presence of God's renewing and refuelling does not mix well with lives that are unconsecrated and unprepared for the anastatic enabling of the Holy Spirit. What might it be like, though, were a human life fully prepared and readied for an infilling and refuelling by the Spirit of God? We find the answer when we look at the fully consecrated, sinless humanity of Jesus Christ.

Where the Old Testament Scriptures speak of the glorious presence of God coming upon His people, there is a sense of danger as well as of wonder, when confronted with the presence and glory of the Creator. The One God. The need to prepare for the coming of God among us is emphasised throughout the Law and the Prophets; and what then did occur when that preparation was made, or not made, is recorded in the narrative Writings of the Old Testament. At the same time, we also see from these Scriptures that God is always looking towards the realisation of His full and beautiful love outworked and fulfilled in His Creation. Integral to this is His redemptive, rescuing activity. In the midst of the tumult filling the creative crucible that is the Cosmos, we see that God has a purposeful plan and focus that He is working out and bringing towards full realisation. The anastatic work of the Holy Spirit is the means whereby this fullness and completeness of God's Kingdom advance is ushered towards completion. This plan is manifested in the resurrection of the dead. This experience is heralded through the specific action of the Holy Spirit's activity in and through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, anastatic empowerment is released into the life of the community that is his body on Earth, the church.

In Jesus, we can observe this anastatic activity of the Holy Spirit as it is expressed throughout his life and ministry, climaxing in the event and circumstances of his death and resurrection. It is present in his conception as Mary's child. The anastatic action of the Holy Spirit releases hope for the future that God has planned, heralded and expressed into the present, bringing the foretaste of a fullness that is to come. It is there in Elizabeth's baby leaping within her womb, as she is filled with the Holy Spirit; and it is there in Mary's response, as she

declares and gives glory to God for His goodness and faithfulness (**Luke 1.39-55**). It is there at Jesus' baptism, where the Holy Spirit descends on him as a dove, at the inception of his ministry (**Luke 3.21-23**). It is demonstrated in Jesus' awareness of anointing and enabling, as he recites the Messianic Manifesto of **Isaiah 61.1-2**, enunciating the ministry he is called to fulfil. It is there in the raising from the dead of Jairus' daughter (**Luke 8.51-56**), the widow of Naim's son (**Luke 7.11-17**) and, in John's Gospel, in the raising of Lazarus (**John 11.38-44**). It is this empowerment and enabling, through the Holy Spirit, that Jesus emphasises as of critical importance for the ongoing ministry of the disciples, following his resurrection (**Luke 24.49**).

Jesus' self understanding of the Holy Spirit's dynamic, recreative enabling is further revealed in John's Gospel. Jesus, in conversation with Nicodemus, speaks of the Holy Spirit coming and going as does the wind (**John 3.8**); and in the account of his conversation with the Samaritan woman at a Well, where Jesus speaks of a spring of water within us that would rise up to eternal life (**John 4.14**); and again, in speaking of streams of living water that will flow from within us (**John 7.38**). In all of this we see the Holy Spirit portrayed as a dynamic, fluid presence that powerfully effects those upon whom He falls and in whom He moves. Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit, when active in this way, as a personal presence who will both teach (**John 14.16-17; 25-26**) and make known to us the convictions and practices of Jesus himself (**John 16.12-15**).

The climax of this work of the Holy Spirit within Jesus' humanity, in expressing the release of anastatic power, comes in the accounts of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. In Matthew's rendering, in **Matthew 27.45**, the hopefulness of coming fulfilment is hinted at in Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". Raised a Jewish boy, reciting and remembering the Psalms, Jesus appears here to be quoting from **Psalms 22**, a psalm that goes on to speak of how those, "who go down to the dust will kneel before him – those who cannot keep themselves alive" (**Psalms 22.29**). The cry of forsakenness is framed within the hope that God shows to the psalmist. There follows, in Matthew's recollection of the moment of Jesus' death, mention of how, "the tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life" (**Matthew 27.52**). This is the path that Jesus endures, clothed in our humanity. Here, in the depths of the self-emptying of the Word made flesh, the Son of God manifests among us his dependence on his Father's purpose and plan and his subsequent vindication. It is in the depths of kenosis that the full power of anastatic empowerment is released and made evident.

Jesus Christ's death occurs, as Caiaphas the high priest prophesied, for the sake of the whole nation (**John 11.50-51**). It is an act of substitutionary atonement, completed at the Cross. Jesus bears a penalty on behalf of the many. Yet his obedience to his Heavenly Father is not simply to go to the Cross: it is an obedience that he knows will carry him through death into resurrection. The Synoptic Gospels each testify that Jesus' path of kenosis, leading through his crucifixion on the Cross, is one that Jesus knew would lead him into being raised again from death to life on the third day (**Matthew 16.21**). The faith and focus for Jesus is not only the Cross. The faith he has to face the Cross is rooted in his confident hope of resurrection.

Jesus' whole ministry is saturated in the presence and purposefulness of anastatic workings. His life and ministry is energised and refuelled through the consistent empowering of the Holy Spirit. This enables him to minister hope into the lives of men, women and children. It is through his own surrender into obedience, trusting in the purpose and command of his Father in heaven, that Jesus opens the way for a refuelling that yields fruitfulness and multiplication of life. Jesus fulfils his own words recorded in John's Gospel that, "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (**John 12.24**). His embarkation on a path that leads through suffering and the Cross into resurrection life is indeed substitutionary. It is also facilitative and exemplary. He goes this way so that we are able to follow on the path of kenosis that leads into anastatic enabling.

Jesus' teaching and actions, in bringing to others both healing and release from oppression by demonic forces, are framed by this narrative of redemption that releases people into the dimensions of the Kingdom of God. This reign of God is brought to be recreatively present amidst the present circumstances that we find ourselves in. Metaphors of consummation and celebration, whether in terms of a bride and bridegroom or a sumptuous banquet, speak of release and realisation of a fulfilment and completion of God's creative purposes, more than otherwise experienced by people. Jesus' presence and the power that ministers wholeness, released through his teaching and ministry, evidences this greater purpose of God.

Yet it remains that this experience of anastatic fulfilment, in the present order of things, is not the experience of everyone. Those who are captivated by or content with the world as it hurtles towards disaster, harnessed by forces hell-bent on its destruction, cannot know or experience this power in their lives.

What Jesus ushers us into is a richer, fuller experience for those who thirst and yearn for it: a reality that is defined by the recreative presence and rule of God, bringing about an order of things that supersedes all that we would otherwise consider or experience as normative.

So it is that blessing will come, as the Sermon on the Mount teaches us, to those who look to be a radical witness to God's rule in their lives, in a manner that places them at odds with what is normative and approved of in the present religious, social and political order. Likewise, it is the most disadvantaged, those in a place of the greatest need of affirmation and preferment, that are most likely to resonate with the quickening, anastatic empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Jesus declares that the revelation of this reality would come to little children, those to whom he chooses to reveal himself (**Luke 21-22**). The way into the Kingdom of God is to receive it like a child (**Luke 18.17**). The power present within Jesus, ministered by the Holy Spirit, acts in this radical way.

Note that this power of anastasis is not something that simply appears at the end, after the main events of Jesus' life and death. Both renunciation and refuelling are to be experienced throughout this present journey (**Luke 18.29-30**). The power that is present in his resurrection is not just an appendix to the focal point of Christ's Cross and death. The focus of Jesus is on the reality of anastasis as well as atoning for our sins. Atoning for our sins prepares the way for our experiencing anastatic empowerment. It is what Jesus looks for and receives in his baptism. It is what is reaffirmed in his transfiguration. It is the hope of this being expressed, in the critical vindication of his own suffering and sacrifice, that strengthens him for the journey that would carry him to and through the Cross of Calvary, his passion and crucifixion. The power and presence of anastasis, a refuelling enabled by the Holy Spirit, is there throughout the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4

Recall and Paul's letters

The Apostle Paul is of special interest to us, not simply due to the significant number of his letters that are part of the New Testament. It is because of the way he shares his recollection of Jesus with us. The relationship that Paul had with the resurrected Christ, distinct from the other apostles, gives him something special in common with us. The original twelve disciples had personally known and followed Jesus during his ministry on Earth, witnessing and learning from Jesus' words, works and ways. Paul had not. He had not been a disciple of Jesus prior to Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul had not spent time with Jesus during his ministry on Earth. He hadn't met Jesus during the three years of Jesus' ministry. In that regard, Paul was no more familiar with the person of Jesus than we are. Paul's relationship with his Lord was grounded, as ours has to be, in a revelation of Jesus to him and a vital relationship with the ascended Christ.

Paul's own testimony, of how he met with Jesus, is recorded in the Book of Acts. Paul had been, as a zealous Pharisee, persecuting Christians. He thought the first disciples of Jesus were misrepresenting the One God. Stories of Jesus' resurrection, together with claims that Jesus was the Messiah sent by God, were nonsense to Paul: until the ascended Jesus confronts Paul, whilst travelling on the road to Damascus. A light flashes around Paul and a voice speaks to him. When he asks whose voice it is, he hears, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting". Paul is blinded and for three days takes neither food nor drink. Then, whilst praying, Paul has a vision of a man called Ananias, coming to place hands on him to restore his sight. Ananias then comes, declaring that he is there to restore Paul's sight and so that Paul might be filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul's sight is restored, he is baptised and strengthened (**Acts 9.3-18**). Paul later recalls, when in Jerusalem and under fear of persecution, he had fallen into a trance while in the Temple, this time seeing and hearing Jesus instruct him to quickly flee Jerusalem (**Acts 22.17-18**).

Let's work through the implications of this. Paul first met with Jesus, experientially, in a way that fundamentally changed him. Paul was confronted with the reality of Jesus, meeting with him in his personal experience. The

presence and power of the One God broke into Paul's life. A new immediacy in knowing God had burst into Paul's immediate experience at a time after Jesus had ascended, when Jesus was no longer physically present in this world. This experience effects a dramatic change in Paul. Light flashes. Jesus speaks. Blindness is healed and the Holy Spirit fills. Trance occurs whilst in prayer. Paul hears and also sees Jesus, guiding and instructing him. This was how Paul was introduced to the reality of Jesus, our ascended Lord. Experiencing faith.

We know, from elsewhere, that Paul was well versed and extremely well instructed in the Jewish Scriptures as a zealous and influential Pharisee (**Philippians 3.5-6**). What led to his profound conversion and change was a confrontation with the ascended Jesus and an infilling of the Holy Spirit in a powerful, transforming way. It is this experience of meeting Jesus – not simply possessing knowledge about Jesus – that is the foundation of all that Paul has then to say and advocate in his use of the Scriptures.

What are the implications of this, for us? Firstly, we need to recognise that Paul's embrace of Jesus did not begin with an understanding of doctrine, well educated though Paul was. It began with an experience of meeting with Jesus. There is, in this, more than a subtle distinction to be made between the presentation of truth through confrontation and the presentation of truth as proposition. For Paul, truth was met with by being confronted with the present, living reality of Jesus Christ. Grasping this reality will shape and affect our understanding of faith. It will effect whether we approach faith as primarily participation in life *with* Jesus, primarily embracing propositions *about* Jesus, or a combination of both. Jesus has not simply gone beyond the veil of death, creating a path before us, that we might meet him one day in the future. Jesus has conquered death. He is alive. We can meet him now.

There is now no barrier standing between us and Jesus Christ, our ascended Lord. Stepping into faith brings us into meeting with and entering into participation with Jesus Christ's present life. It means that death no longer marks the end of who and what we are: life in Jesus is what now defines us. To become alive in Christ is to be liberated from the constraints of present circumstance and the inevitability of death. It is to experience the beginnings of eternal life now.

Secondly, Paul's confrontation with the ascended Jesus affects our relationships. It affects how we construe our relationship with Jesus and our relationship with other Christians, in the manner we live out our Christian life. Where we understand that our life is one where we are actively participating with Jesus

Christ, we will better understand our calling to operate as part of Jesus' body on Earth. Not only does Jesus make himself known to us. He makes himself known to others by his presence in and among us, radiated through us. Our life is therefore given a new purpose: to give witness to and manifest the potency of the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ.

A third implication, arising out of Paul's meeting with the ascended Christ, relates to our experience of Christ's rule over all things. Through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, when Ananias laid hands on him, Paul's meeting with the One God released him into a new appreciation of Christ's authority. Paul realised that Jesus' messianic ministry has initiated an advance of God's rule on Earth, that the Christ is able to deliver people from captivity. Full atonement, as Jesus has brought about, means that entry into God's presence is enabled and is to be part of our present experience, through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit.

Certainly, our full realisation of God's Kingdom rule has not yet come; but it has begun. The foretold, future rule of God had pierced into our present experience and circumstance. An anticipation and a foretaste of all that is to come is available and possible for us. We see this in Paul's letters to the Ephesians and to the Corinthians. Paul recognised that our present experience of the infilling of the Holy Spirit acts as a deposit and guarantee of what is to come (**Ephesians 1.14**), sealing us as God's own people and clothing us with His life (**2 Corinthians 1.22; 5.5**).

Noting that the fullness of what we are to enter and experience has yet to be realised, we return to the matter of how we are to understand our present participation and relationship with Jesus Christ. An understanding of being clothed with the life of Christ, through being drawn into participation in life with him, punctuates Paul's understanding of faith. Faith has to be more than bare belief or credulity, distanced from any meaningful response in the way we conduct ourselves. It is more than an act of trust. Faith is a relationship into which we invest ourselves, centred in Jesus Christ.

Our lives are now to be founded 'in Christ', an expression repeated by Paul many times, placing us within the circumference of a life that is circumscribed and defined by Jesus Christ. We are as Christians, in a real sense, to be part of the body of Christ. His words, works and ways are to be owned by us. Faith in Jesus Christ becomes the act of identifying completely with him, actively choosing to live a life that expresses his present reality. Faith is the present outworking of a hope that is rooted in Jesus Christ, because he lives. Such faith is far from being

a detached adherence or acquiescence to a bare belief in static doctrines. It is a present experience of communion with the One God that leads to the practice, worked out in our humanity, of purposefully participating in life with Jesus Christ.

All this prepares us to view the importance, for Paul, of Recall in the Christian life of discipleship. Because our life is in Christ, we are to recall Christ. We are to remember him, his words and works and ways. Because he is the Messiah and is alive, Jesus now defines us. All of him, in his life, his ministry, his death and his resurrection, is to become the basis of our identity and purpose as his disciples. Our recollection is not to be limited to one aspect or any single part of his life, ministry and victory. Our recollection is to be focused on Jesus Christ and all that he is and all that we know of him through his life, ministry and victory over the power of death and the Devil. A call to the discipline of Recall is a critical fulcrum within Paul's thought, a key to understanding the seamless connection which joins his understanding of our redemption by Jesus Christ to our ongoing sanctification by the Holy Spirit.

For Paul, the immensity of Jesus and all that he represents is expansive. As Paul's Colossian hymn rehearses (**Colossians 1.15-20**), Jesus is the expression and fulfilment of all that God our Father has designed and intended for us. It is not only that we are to place our trust in God, for life beyond death, because of the promises God has made and what Jesus has done. We are called to see that a true fullness of life - in our experienced, present reality - is found in and through Jesus Christ. We are to understand that all the promises of God find their fulfilment and completion in Jesus Christ; and that these promises will bear fruitfulness in us, through our entering into and growing in our participation in life with Jesus Christ.

So it is that, in addressing the Corinthian church, Paul reminds the disciples that their gathering and celebrating of the Lord's Supper is to be an occasion when Jesus Christ is remembered. Echoing Jesus Christ's admonition to the twelve disciples when celebrating the Last Supper, as recorded by Luke (**Luke 22.19**), Paul instructs the Christians in Corinth to remember Jesus: both when breaking and eating the bread (**1 Corinthians 11.24**) and in sharing in the cup of wine, stressing the fulfilment of God's covenant promises that comes in and through Jesus Christ (**1 Corinthians 11.25**). When we share in the bread and the wine, our focus is to be upon Jesus and all he stands for. We are to recall him, in the entirety of his words, his works and his ways.

This takes us back into the second implication we noted, arising out of Paul's appreciation of our present relationship with Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is alive now, drawing us to himself in his glorified humanity, he makes Himself known among us, in and through our humanity. We are to function, in relationship with others, as Jesus' body on earth, here and now. So it is that the action of Recall is vital: we need this recall in order to constantly reorient ourselves around Jesus. We need to recall, rediscover and reaffirm that our true identity is in Jesus Christ; and we need to do this, again and again. Recall is to focus on the reality of our new and true identity, expressed in convictions we hold to and practices we pursue, that is made manifest in Jesus.

This understanding of our identity formed in Jesus, both personally as Christians and collectively as church, is so easily lost sight of. This was the case in the early days of the nascent church. Paul recognised that there was a constant pull away from a healthy, corporate identity into patterns of fragmented, individualised religiosity associated with rules and regulations, ceremonies and cultic acts, as occurred in the demise of ancient Israel. The central act of anamnesis in the Lord's Supper, recalling Christ and all he stands for, was to play a vital part in combatting such decay. Our new identity, which we enter into through Jesus Christ, is rooted in his humanity. Our appreciation of the Christian life begins, not by viewing ourselves as atomised, separated individual believers. We are each part of the organic reality of God's people: a united, organic plurality of persons who together express the presence, purpose and empowerment that comes in and through Jesus Christ.

This is a good place to start in developing a deeper understanding of discipleship and growing in the disciplines of our Christian life today. Firstly, longing for and entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Secondly, grasping that we now have an identity that is bigger than ourselves, because we are redefined as people because of Jesus. An emphasis on the corporate nature of discipleship living is not peculiar to Paul within the New Testament's letters; but it is an integral part of Paul's thought, in giving expression to the nature of the Gospel and the Christian life. The church is called to express the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ. This is to be central in defining who the church is and how she behaves. It is integrally part of the message of the Gospel that is to be proclaimed.

Chapter 5

Renounce and Paul's Letters

As we go on to look at the significance of both Renounce and Refuel in Paul's writing, we need to note that, for Paul, the two are irrevocably linked. As Paul emphasised in writing to the Corinthian disciples, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (**1 Corinthians 15:3-4**). The revelation of God's love and mercy in Jesus Christ, enabling our salvation, required both the Cross and the Empty Tomb: both kenosis and anastasis, renouncing and refuelling. Were we to look at one of these in isolation from the other, we would risk compromising the meaning of both. The stark costliness of kenosis has to be countered with the transforming enhancement of anastasis. Authentic ecstasy, in the tasting of anastasis, will always follow the personal costliness of kenosis. Both Renounce and Refuel have to be held together. There would be those who would speak of the power of the Cross, forgetful of the Resurrection. There will also be those who speak of experiencing the power of the Spirit of Resurrection, forgetful of the Cross. We must disallow both of these departures from the Pauline witness.

Proclaiming the Lord's death

We have noted that for Paul, our remembering of Jesus is a remembering of all that he is and brings to us in his words, works and ways. The manner that Paul's engagement in anamnesis leads to an appreciation, by the Christian disciple, of the necessity in embracing kenosis, is vividly expressed in the passage **1 Corinthians 1.22 – 2.5**. There Paul contests that a fuller knowing of Jesus Christ comes through the Cross, whereby Paul wants, "to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**1 Corinthians 2.2**). Paul speaks of an experienced knowing that goes to the core of our being, both cognitively and affectively; and it is a knowing that will lead the disciple specifically to an appreciation of Christ crucified. It is not simply a proposition about the Cross, or of what transpired at the Cross, that Paul articulates. What Paul expresses is longing for a deeper, personal journey: a journey that comes about through being joined to Jesus, in the knowing of Jesus Christ in his death.

Why is this so important to Paul? What is it about the death of Christ that has to be emphasised? Paul clearly perceives that the Lord's death is the means of our being reconciled to God: it is central to Christ's atoning mission, redeeming us for God and rescuing us from death. Yet there is another aspect of Christ's death alluded to here. A clue comes in the way Paul speaks of the Lord's Supper and our remembering of Jesus Christ, through our participation in the Supper. Paul does not speak of the Lord's Supper as a means of remembering, exclusively, the death of Christ. Indeed, the call for recollection, as we have seen, appears to be directed to Jesus and the totality of his words, works and ways. It is Jesus, all of Jesus, that we are to remember. Paul declares, however, that the taking of the bread and the wine is also an act of proclamation by us: a proclamation of Christ's death. Paul declares to the Corinthian disciples that, in sharing the bread and the wine together, we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (**1 Corinthians 11.26**). Paul is explaining that our participation in the Supper, our taking of the body and blood of Christ to ourselves, is a means of our proclaiming the death of Christ.

A helpful clue of what Paul might mean by this can be found in Paul's account of his conversion and calling when brought before Festus and Agrippa, as recorded by Luke in the narrative of **Acts 26**. There, Paul explains that his commission is to bear the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, "that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds" (**Acts 26.20**). Integral to experiencing faith is renouncing of what is incompatible with Jesus Christ. Paul's understanding is that this act of renouncing is a conscious act. It is not only surrender to the will of God that is required. There has to be a putting to death of who we are. In the natural, outside faith, we are people living outside the will of God. That has to stop: we have to die.

In associating our own humanity, our flesh and blood, with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, we become a proclamation of what Jesus has done and what has happened to us because of him. It is because of this new identity in Christ, which we choose to embrace, that we are able to proclaim the Lord's death: for we proclaim that we are united with Jesus Christ in his death. Our proclamation is an acknowledgement of the efficacy of Jesus Christ's death; and also our commitment to sharing in it and being rooted in him, as a demonstration of its power. Our taking to ourselves of the bread and the wine, signifying the body and blood of Jesus Christ, is our proclamation of the kenotic, redemptive action of Jesus Christ and our commitment to participating, with him, in his kenotic, redemptive mission and ministry.

We see this worked out further in Paul's understanding of baptism, in **Romans 6**. Baptism into Christ is properly an initiation, not merely an act of recognition, into his death for us. It is an initiation into participation in his way of living and dying. As such, Christian baptism is a baptism into Jesus' death (**Romans 6.3**). Baptism is an affirmation, "that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with" (**Romans 6.6**). Baptism is an act of renunciation as well as consecration, arising out of our recollecting what has been made known to us of the One God in Jesus Christ; and it is an expression, on our part, of self-identifying with Jesus Christ and all that he stands for.

In unpacking the pericope, "to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified", we begin to see something of the vital place that kenosis plays for Paul, in his understanding of faith in Jesus Christ and the outworking of the Christian life. A bland belief or acceptance of facts is not what he advocates. Faith is to be rooted in being joined to Jesus Christ in his death. It is the intentional act of giving ourselves utterly to him, that we might be at the utter disposal of God.

Repentance and Faith

When we grasp how our identity in Christ is so clearly linked to associating with him in his death, repentance and faith can best be understood as complementary expressions within this enactment of kenosis. Repentance carries the sense of disinvestment or disengagement from what is distant from and displeasing to God. Faith connotes the complementary action of investing ourselves in the mercy, love, pleasure and purpose of God. We see this bilateral emphasis, in holding repentance and faith together, expressed again and again in Paul's letters. "Put to death" is the admonition that Paul addresses to the Roman church, when speaking of acts arising out of instincts that are contrary to the leading of the Holy Spirit, who is drawing us into a Christ-centred life (**Romans 8.13**). Again, in his letter to the Colossian disciples, Paul notes that it because of instinctive passions being indulged by people that, "the wrath of God is coming" (**Colossians 3.6**). At the same time, these admonitions are accompanied by a call to be led by the Holy Spirit and to be clothed with Jesus Christ, investing in the new identity that is founded in Christ. Paul's understanding is that clothing ourselves with Jesus Christ involves a disavowal of what our sinful nature would lead us into (**Romans 13.14**); and also an owning of the characteristics of Christ's nature (**Colossians 3.12**). It is only through aligning ourselves with Jesus Christ in his death that we are enabled to enter

into the life that he brings to us (**Romans 15.53**). This apparent paradox is nothing other than Paul's outworking of what it means, "to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified".

The Philippian hymn

This double movement, of both disinvestment and ownership, is expressed in the key, kenotic passage of **Philippians 2.5-11**, known as the Philippian hymn.

The hymn relates to Jesus Christ, in terms of his values and practices. It does not present, although twentieth century commentary has frequently treated it as doing so, as a hymn celebrating the Incarnation, wherein the Eternal Word and Son of God becomes flesh, as met with in **John 1.14**. Such an analysis tends to read back, into emerging New Testament theological statements, perspectives that did not emerge until the fourth and fifth centuries and within the context of Platonic, philosophical frameworks. Indeed, a representation of the Philippian hymn as simply a statement of divine kenosis is in danger of diminishing the very point that Paul goes on to make, in the verses that follow the hymn.

Paul's focus appears to be on what occurs in and through the humanity of Christ, a humanity that he shares with us. It is on the basis of this shared humanity that Paul can exhort his Philippian audience (**Philippians 2.5**) to observe what transpired in and through the humanity of Christ (**Philippians 2.7-8**) and to imitate it. Paul appears to have a genuine aspiration, even an anticipation, that Christian disciples should emulate the attitude of Jesus Christ himself. Paul's expectation is that this should be part of a process that will come to allow Christ's disciples, "to shine like stars in the universe" (**Philippians 2.15**). The close association of the kenotic act that Jesus has undertaken in his humanity, with what might be expected to be exhibited in the lives of Christian disciples, will lead to a manifestation of the triumph of God's redeeming power in the lives of disciples, as evidenced in and through the humanity of Jesus Christ himself (**Philippians 2.9-11**).

This perspective of a double movement, of both disinvestment and ownership of a new identity in Jesus Christ, can help us in our approach to the repeated affirmation by Paul that our lives are 'in Christ'. This should not be taken as a metaphor that simply explains our future, eternal destiny. Rather, it should serve as an encouragement for us now, in embracing a new identity that is discovered through our pursuing Jesus Christ's path of kenosis. We are called to

identify with what Jesus Christ has undertaken in his own humanity. This approach brings us to the seedbed of human creativity, wherein the Holy Spirit can act upon and within us in an intensified way, as we give ourselves into adopting the attitude of Jesus Christ, manifested in and through his humanity. In this way the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ become our paradigm. The Gospels become a textbook for our own values and practices. The letters of Paul become reference texts in seeing how we might better navigate the challenges that such an approach brings to us.

We will continue to develop the implication and application of themes, touched on above, in parts 2 and 3 of this book. For now, in concluding this chapter, we return to our opening theme, regarding our proclaiming the death of Christ in our sharing of communion. We might continue to reflect on Paul's understanding of what it means to, "always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (**2 Corinthians 4:10**). What we are met with is Paul's conviction, that it is vitally important to demonstrate Christlike practices as an expression of Christian discipleship. As Paul goes on to say, "For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body" (**2 Cor 4:11**). The pattern of our living is to reflect Jesus Christ's life. It begins with Recall. It continues with a will to Renounce.

Kenosis is integral to Paul's appreciation both of Jesus Christ and the life we are called to as his disciples. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in **Galatians 2:20**, where Paul declares that, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul focuses on our identification with Jesus Christ in his death as the basis for our life and outworking of faith, a faith that is rooted in the convictions and practices of Jesus Christ himself. Our identification with the death of Christ is integrally woven into what follows, in our being released into the life of Christ. As Jesus taught, unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it does not bear fruit. So it is for us. There is no meaningful faith without heartfelt renunciation. It is only by giving ourselves over to the process of kenosis that we make space for the Holy Spirit's infilling and enabling presence, bringing anastatic empowerment to be released within us. It is something of the power of what this means for our lives, as expressed in Paul's letters, that we go on to look at in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Refuel and Paul's Letters

The Holy Spirit is the Wind of God, shaping and forming all that is created. His dynamic presence and intensity works redemptively, recreating a deeper conformity to the pattern that emanates from the Word of God, enfleshed in Jesus Christ. This awesome and often mysterious presence and power of the One God is recognised and spoken of throughout the Bible. The Holy Spirit, the Creator Spirit, birthing life and bringing reformation and reshaping to all that exists.

Both mystery and clarity shine through, in this anastatic revelation. Mystery comes by the Holy Spirit. Clarity comes through focus on Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the One God who fills and enables the humanity of Jesus Christ, who is also the One God, through whom the Holy Spirit fills our humanity with fullness of life. Our participation in Christ is wholly enabled for us by the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus Christ the Creator Spirit, working now in the power of New Creation enabled for us through Christ's resurrection, is released in a powerful way into our lives. Where we find in Paul's writing a call to 'live by the Spirit', this is made possible because the focus wherein we locate our lives is 'in Christ'.

First stirrings

We now look at some aspects to Paul's understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in the Christian disciple, when we offer ourselves to God (**Romans 12.1**) through Jesus Christ.

Paul's appreciation of the Holy Spirit, active in an amplified and intensified way in the life of the Christian disciple, is rooted in his recognition of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the event of his subsequent, bodily ascension into the Heavens. The Holy Spirit is now able to be active in our humanity in an especially intense way, whereby we are met with, "His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly realms" (**Ephesians 1.19-20**). Because of Jesus, the Spirit would exercise anastatic empowerment in our lives.

This Holy Spirit, who enabled the vindication of Jesus by empowering his resurrection (**Romans 1.4**), is also at work in our lives. He brings a deposit or foretaste of what is to come, because of what has happened in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit now imparts to us a taste, a token of what we wait for in hope. Through the Holy Spirit, we can begin to anticipate what we are becoming as new creations in Christ. The promises of God are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God” (**2 Corinthians 1.20**). It is out of this fulfilment, because of what transpired in the humanity of God’s Word become flesh, that the Holy Spirit now comes to us in a new way.

Growing into this rootedness in Jesus is an ongoing process, involving both recalling and renouncing, bringing us into a season of refuelling. It is refuelling for a long journey, a journey of discipleship that will last us a lifetime. All our present experience of the Spirit, intensified through our faith in Jesus, is anticipatory of a fullness that is yet to come. This fullness will be realised when we are fully transformed in our union with Jesus. Until then, what we know of the Spirit at work in Jesus’ name is partial; yet it is also proleptic, pointing to a fullness that we will be delivered into, in the future. Consequently, there will be - and we should long and look for - signs and wonders that come as a demonstration of the Spirit’s power presently at work in us, as Paul experienced throughout his evangelism and life of witness to the advent of God’s Kingdom (**Romans 15.19**). The Spirit of God is indeed personal; and that personal reality is to be met with and experienced by us in a powerful, dynamic way. The Spirit, as a deposit in our lives, is not static or inert. The Spirit exerts in us a dynamic, personal, powerful foretaste of a fullness that is to come.

This aspect of the Holy Spirit present in us as a deposit of a future that has begun to break into our lives, leading us towards what we long for and hope for, is referred to by Paul when writing to the Corinthians. He declares that God has, “set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (**2 Corinthians 1.22**). Paul emphasises that while this present body we occupy suffers decay and death, in the light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ we can know that we will receive a new body like his because, “the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (**2 Corinthians 5.5**).

Forming a perception of the Spirit as a dynamic deposit, working to shape and to change us, should serve to remind us that we have not yet become complete and mature: we have not yet been perfected. We have not yet entered that state of existence whereby we are fully what we are to become. We have not, in this life, experienced the fullness of the bodily resurrection that is our destiny. In this sense, we are not yet presently recipients of all that the Holy Spirit would accomplish in us and through us. That we do not yet experience the fullness of what is to come should not, however, diminish an expectation of a greater manifestation of the Holy Spirit being expressed in our lives. Yet the manifestations that the Holy Spirit will bring to us will always be but a foretaste of a fulfilment that is yet to come, when Jesus ushers in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Delayed Action

We see this in relation to our physical bodies. We can and should recognise and give thanks for the full effectiveness of our redemption by Jesus Christ and the penalty paid by him at the Cross of Calvary. The full outworking of that redemption in our physical bodies, in the complete dissolution of the power of sin in us, is yet to take place. We are redeemed; yet we have still to enter into an experience of the full effect of that redemption, where sin has no presence either in or among us. So it is that, in writing to the disciples in Ephesus, Paul again states that this promised, Holy Spirit serves as, “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory” (**Ephesians 1.14**).

Paul could affirm, when writing to the disciples in Rome, that, “if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you” (**Romans 8.11**), going on to assert that we, “who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” (**Romans 8.23**). Understanding this ‘delayed action’, in regards to a relationship between the present and the future outworking of what has been brought about through Jesus Christ, is important. We will not, in this present time, receive everything we hope for. We wait with longing.

That the Holy Spirit applies the victory of Jesus Christ to our lives is of major importance to us. It effects our understanding of the relationship between what we hope for in the future and what we might form faith for in the present: there can be a significant gap between what we hope for and what we have faith to

receive. The level of faith we have in the present is not simply a matter of human effort. We can only have faith for what God would release into our live in the present. Perceiving this 'delayed action' shapes our understanding of the response that the Holy Spirit evokes within us now. The Holy Spirit provokes a cry from within us, looking forward from our present experience - with eagerness and expectation - for a fullness that is yet to come.

We see the longing cry of hopefulness in Paul's use of the Aramaic term, 'Abba', which the Gospel of Mark records Jesus as uttering during his time in the Garden of Gethsemane (**Mark 14.36**). Paul, in describing the Holy Spirit as the 'Spirit of sonship', employs 'Abba' in denoting our cry to God, not as a cry of fear but of anticipation of sharing in Jesus' glory, a glory that is yet to be revealed in us (**Romans 8.15-19**). Again, in addressing the Galatian disciples, Paul emphasises that our cry of 'Abba' arises from us by the Spirit, because we are God's heirs (**Galatians 4.6-7**).

Paul's association of the Spirit stirring within us, corresponding to the uttering of 'Abba' by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, is significant. The Spirit of God is here now, meeting with us, when we experience and express our deepest need and longing for the intervention of God. As Paul rehearses in **Romans 7**, where we are repeatedly confronted with our own inability to turn away from sin, even when we try, it is only through the help of the Holy Spirit that we can, "put to death the misdeeds of the body" (**Romans 8.13**). As the Spirit is with Jesus consistently, through the deepest pain of his passion, so the Holy Spirit meets with us, in human depths of desperation and longing, enabling us to render the cry of 'Abba', Father, to God. It is the Spirit who draws us deeper into sharing in the life of Jesus' sonship, affirming us as co-heirs with Jesus in God's eternal plans.

What is taking place within us, through the intensified presence and power of the Holy Spirit, is a deep work of transformation. It is a powerful movement of the Spirit within us, a work that can truly be described as metamorphosis, changing and moulding us in ways that are not necessarily comfortable or enjoyable for us, yet working resurrection power into and within us. The Spirit, in this way, brings us into a deeper participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. All of this is part of the present work of the Holy Spirit within us. As Paul notes, we, "are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (**2 Corinthians 3.18**).

Participation in Christ

1 Corinthians 6 presents us with a narrative wherein Paul is reflecting on what is possible and what is permissible in disciples' lives (**v 12**). It underlines his perspective that the Christian is a person who is caught up in a process of transformation; but also a person who is arrested and limited by their state within the present, natural order. We are restricted, not least by our bodies, which are still subject to sinning. Paul notes, on the one hand, the transformation that has already occurred in the Corinthian disciples' lives (**v 11**): one day they will be among those, completely transformed, who will judge the angels! Yet it remains that these same Christians could be found to be acting, at times, in a way that was incompatible with the integrity of Kingdom living (**v 7-8**).

This is no different from our experience of Christian life today. Believers can and will be significantly changed when exposed to that intensified irradiation of God's holiness that comes by the Holy Spirit; but the same Christians are yet capable of acting in a manner that is not readily compatible with the ways of the Kingdom of God. There are no exceptions to this among us. Now, does this mean that our experience of the Holy Spirit is illegitimate or false (**v 19**)? Not at all. It does mean, however, that the Holy Spirit's transformational working requires a commitment, by and among us, in looking to, "keep in step with the Spirit" (**Galatians 5.25**). In all of this, we see again the necessary relationship between kenosis and anastasis, between Renounce and Refuel. In our present state of existence, we have to willingly and intentionally give ourselves to the way of Christ. Recall, Renounce and Refuel are interconnected. This process will necessarily involve anamnesis, a recalling of Christ. We will need to intentionally look to renounce practices that are not readily compatible to the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ. The process of recall will help us to see what the Holy Spirit would lead us to renounce, that we might come before the One God in prayer, seeking to be refuelled for living as Christ's disciples.

Paul's call is for us to live by being led by the Holy Spirit (**Romans 8.13**), not gratifying our sinful nature (**Galatians 5.16**). Paul's emphasis upon our looking to keep in step with the Spirit underlines his appreciation of the 'in between' world that we inhabit, once we have turned to Jesus Christ in faith. In coming into experiencing faith in Jesus Christ, we have undertaken to cross from a world

trapped by the power of sin and death into a life that is ours because of Jesus Christ. We have to learn what it means to be located in Jesus Christ. This is a life that is to be enabled and empowered the Holy Spirit, who longs to be present with increasing intensity within us.

It is too easy to fall into one of two extremes that can diminish this manner of dynamic, Christian living. On the one hand, we can easily mistake every intuitive, spiritual experience as born of God and an expression of the Holy Spirit's leading and enabling. This would be dangerous: it would be to disregard the importance that Paul attached to centring our life on Jesus Christ. We need to recall what it is to be joined with him in his death, renouncing a life that is caught up in values and practices dishonouring to God. We also need to recognise that authentic refuelling comes only to those who recall Jesus Christ as their life's centre. We need to keep renouncing a self-centred life.

On the other hand, we can seek to keep control of our own lives in a way that reduces our expectation and openness to the Holy Spirit working in and through us, in anastatic empowerment. Fear can make us spiritually frigid. When there is a reticence with regard to experiencing faith that might take us beyond our own comfort and safety zones, we quench the Spirit. It is spiritually incapacitating when we no longer thirst for that greater intensity of God's presence that the Holy Spirit would bring to us. It is not enough to simply recall and renounce. To be effective disciples, we need to be refuelled.

Paul recognised that the Holy Spirit works in and through people who are not yet rid of their sinful propensities and prejudices. He also recognises that, because of what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us, that the Holy Spirit can and will prevail in bringing about the purposes of God in and through our lives; should we look for, long for and allow the Holy Spirit to visit with us in His anastatic enabling and empowering presence.

Chapter 7

The Other New Testament Books

In looking beyond the Gospel accounts and the Letters of Paul to the other Books of the New Testament, we are seeking to see whether our focus points of Recall, Renounce and Refuel can be identified among them. These remaining Letters and other writings, recorded in a variety of styles, offer us a broader understanding of Christian discipleship. While not discounting a diversity of emphasis within the New Testament, our aim is to establish whether our three focus points of Recall, Renounce and Refuel can be associated with the message communicated through each of these Books. In this chapter, we look at each of the remaining New Testament Books in turn.

Acts of the Apostles

Pivotal to the Acts of the Apostles is a narrative that stresses a dependancy on the activity of the Holy Spirit coming upon and indwelling disciples, giving expression to the continuing mission and ministry of Jesus Christ. Immediately, we are met with a celebration of our third focus point, Refuel. Expressions of anastatic empowerment feature in a big way in the Book of Acts.

The Acts of the Apostles chronicles an intensified presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the newly established church, following on the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ and the intense outpouring of the Holy Spirit that occurred on the Day of Pentecost. Every act of effective church development and outreach, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, is dependent on anastatic empowerment. This arises because of an intensified manifestation of presence and power by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is spoken of as inhabiting disciples, enabling an interface between the present order of the Cosmos and the invasive presence and power of the Kingdom of God. We see here released, in a post-ascension environment, a foretaste of the fullness of a new order. A story is told, of entry into and participation in the advance of the Kingdom of God, that Jesus Christ has made possible.

The Acts of the Apostles follows on as a second volume to the Gospel of Luke, noting what occurred after the promised power (**Luke 24.49**), to be received

from Heaven, had come upon the disciples. The narrative begins by noting the appearance of Jesus to the apostles after his resurrection, prior to his ascension. He spends time instructing, eating and talking with them. Then he is taken up into a heavenly dimension of reality not yet experienced by us. What is then experienced, after a prolonged period of prayer and waiting, is a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples; and a consequential explosion in the growth of the church. This follows on from the proclamation of Jesus's resurrection after the coming of a mighty wind and "tongues of fire" (**Acts 2.3**) that rested on each one of the apostles and other disciples who had gathered with them.

As we work our way through the Acts of the Apostles, we see further manifestations of anastatic empowerment. We see the disciples empowered and enabled to glorify God and minister to others, through signs and wonders that manifest God's love and saving power, as Jesus did in his own ministry on Earth. We hear words of warning and calls to repentance, similar to messages that Jesus had declared. We witness a demonstration of acts of judgement from God, not dissimilar from acts of judgement to be found in the narratives of the Old Testament. God's discipline, as well as His deliverance and healing, is experienced by people. When Ananias and Sapphira, among the newly converted disciples, lie to God and test the Holy Spirit, they are struck down. A renewed fear of God comes upon the church. Among the crowds that gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and demonised, all are healed (**Acts 5.1-16**).

With Jesus now in Heaven, experience of faith and participation in ministry - that was the vocation of the apostles - is further released on Earth by the Holy Spirit acting in Jesus' name. What is evidenced among the disciples, however, is something that is for them more intense than before. Previously, the presence and power of the Kingdom of God had been expressed, first and foremost, through the ministry of Jesus Christ. Now, it is expressed in the ministry of the apostles and other disciples. This expression is not simply one of empowerment: it is an intensification of the presence and purposefulness of God's Kingdom advance. The Kingdom of God is seen to interface with our present, experienced reality. There is a manifestation of the atemporal dimensions that God inhabits and works through, breaking into the temporal dimensions of space and time that the apostles and other disciples inhabit, even though Jesus is no longer physically with them. The presence, purposefulness and power of the One God

had come among the disciples of Jesus through an intensified outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

There is, in all of this, the beginnings of the outworking of a new order, characterised by the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ, expressed through the apostles and disciples. It is a new order that has broken into our present reality; but it is not yet realised in its full manifestation. There is a need for perseverance in working through conflicts, both among the new disciples and also with the inherited structures and practices of Judaism. The nascent church, understanding itself to be a true expression of the outworking of God's covenant purposes to Israel through the Messiah, has to face the challenge of working out the implications of what that might mean for the men and women who were becoming Christians.

There is also the challenge of developing moral and ethical standards for the Christian life, wrestling over questions of continuity with the life that Israel was called to adhere to, expressed in the Old Testament Law and prophetic teachings. How did the requirements of the Mosaic Law relate to the fullness of life that Jesus brings? We can see a realisation that Old Testament revelation needs to be interpreted in a way that is true to the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. The significance of the revelation given by God to Israel, through the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, has now to be interpreted and practised in the light of Jesus Christ.

Throughout this process, we see that the release of anastatic empowerment through the Holy Spirit requires that the disciplines of Recall and Renounce be engaged in. A continuity with the revelation of God to His people in the past has now to be traced in a new way, in the light of Jesus Christ. The release of the power of the One God demands that people remember the call to holiness. Following on the ascension to Heaven of Jesus Christ, this experienced faith required those within the church to apply themselves to kenotic acts of humbling themselves, listening to and consulting both with the apostles and one another, working out what it means to now participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Interpreting anew and applying the Old Testament Scriptures to daily living, in the light of experiencing faith in Jesus Christ, is essential for moving forward as Christian disciples.

This process of Recall, Renounce and Refuel takes place in a context where the disciples are constantly reminded of the battle between the invasive power of the Kingdom of God and the Powers and Principalities in this world that seek to

bind and blind men and women. The activity of spiritual forces that resist God and interfere in the present order of the Cosmos has not yet come to an end. Yet the disciples had passed over, in their experience, from the limitations of our temporal, present reality into engagement with the atemporal dimension of the Kingdom of God. They knew they were in a battle, serving the advance of the Kingdom of God and overcoming spiritual forces of evil.

This interface of two realities means that, for now, both deliverance and death co-exist without any suggestion of inconsistency or contradiction. In **Acts 12** we hear of the apostle James executed by Herod, whilst the Apostle Peter is miraculously delivered from prison. Paul is also miraculously delivered from prison in Philippi (**Acts 16**), leading to the salvation of the jailer and his family; and yet is later taken into custody. In responding to a warning from the prophet Agabus, “Paul answered, ‘Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus’” (**Acts 21.13**). Joy and pain are both present, in this life, despite the fact that the Kingdom of God is present with us and Jesus has defeated death and the Devil. There is hope, because of Jesus Christ’s resurrection, amidst ongoing persecution and rejection of Jesus Christ and his Gospel. The Kingdom of God has broken through in a new way, by the Holy Spirit and because of Jesus Christ; yet the final resolution to the conflict has yet to find its full expression.

The presence of our three focal points and their continual interface in the Christian life is well characterised in the way that the Book of Acts comes to a close. In **Acts 28** we find Paul restricted, under house arrest for two years in a house rented by him; yet in a context of kenotic surrender, he proclaims the reality of the Kingdom of God and teaches about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit’s enabling of Paul is rooted in his abandonment of self in the service of the Gospel. It is not a deliverance out of a world, fractured by faults and failings, despair and darkness; but it is the manifestation of a deliverance that has broken through, as light breaks in and dispels darkness, bearing the presence and promise of a fullness in Jesus Christ that is both before us and has also come to be present with us in this present life. Recall, Renounce and Refuel are integrally woven together in this narrative, inviting us to persevere along a path of discipleship.

The Letters of John

The significance of the three Letters of John to our study lies in the way they continue to emphasise a theme, heavily woven into John's Gospel, of enacted love. Here we see an expression of love arising out of both kenotic intentionality and anastatic enabling. What we are confronted with is an exposition of the value of love in shaping the church's ethical practice. An emphasis on love as a Christian practice is not unique to John. The passage most celebrated as an exposition of the nature of love is found in Paul's writings, in **1 Corinthians 13**. What is special to John's writing is the way this apostle emphasises convictions and practices, accompanying the outworking of a love, that are truly reflective of Jesus Christ's salvific mission.

The Letter known as **1 John** recalls the characteristics of God, in terms of His attributes of light, truth and love, that we are called into through Jesus Christ. The integrity and constancy of the One God calls us to apply ourselves to pursuing integrity and constancy in our own behaviour. There is a recognition of our propensity to rebel and do wrong; but there is, with this, a reminder for us to give ourselves into the light of God and to, "walk as Jesus did" (**1 Jn 2.6**). Love is better expressed when we apply ourselves to renouncing sin, acknowledging that we do not easily escape its presence in our lives (**1.8 – 2.1**). Sin is antithetical to Christlike love, a love that calls us to follow the way of our Master. Cravings, lusts and boasting – characteristic of so much that is sinful in human life - are not conduits of God's love (**2.15-17**). To be filled with love that is true to Jesus, we are to recall him as he truly is; and to renounce and resist what is untrue to him. This really matters.

The anastatic work of the Spirit finds expression in an anointing that transforms and informs us. It is this characteristic of the Spirit, working conformity to the Son of God in us and, therefore, to God the Father, that shapes within us the hallmark of Christian love (**2.27**). The pattern of love to be shaped in us is one that looks outward, to others (**3.16-18**).

At the same time, we are not to discount that there are forces that would seek to mislead us: there are many antichrists, who do not seek to remain true to Jesus Christ but deny the Father and the Son (**2.18-22**). These forces would draw us out off our participation in Christ. Continuing commitment to sin is a sign of the influence and authority of the Devil in a person's life. The captivating power of the Devil has, however, been destroyed by the Son of God. Our participation in the victory of Jesus Christ is what distinguishes the children of God from those

of the Devil (**3.8-10**). A key indicator that evidences our belonging to God is the presence of love for one another, “with action and in truth” (**3.18**). It is the presence of this love in our lives that demonstrates that we, “belong to the truth” (**3.19**). Again, this is accompanied by an emphasis that we know we live in Christ, “by the Spirit he gave us” (**3.24**).

It is not to be assumed that an awareness of spiritual power at work proves the activity of the Spirit of God. Critically, “This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (**4.2**). The presence of the Holy Spirit corresponds and synchronises with what is manifested in and through the humanity of Jesus Christ when he was among us on the earth, as a human person. Because of this we are enabled to live and enact a life that is not demonstrably under the control of the Evil One (**5.19**).

What is noticeable in **1 John** is this emphasis on the synchronisation of our participation in Christ with the outworking of our lives in a way that is consonant with Christ. This synchronisation is evidenced in the practice of a love that is reflective of Jesus Christ. It is the demonstration of this outworking, in and through our lives, that exhibits and proves the Holy Spirit is at work within us.

The brief, second and third letters of John continue the theme. **2 John** stresses the importance of loving one another, that we “walk in love” (**6**). It again emphasises that those who do not recognise that Jesus Christ, “as coming in the flesh”, are deceivers (**7**). Our participation in the life of Christ is tied up with his having shared the humanity that we inhabit. A true recalling of Jesus Christ draws us into participation in and replication of Christlike love. Again, **3 John** speaks of “walking in the truth” (**4**), imitating and doing what is good; and that any doing of evil is evidence of having “not seen God” (**11**).

Hebrews

The Letter to the Hebrews begins with a rehearsing of the Son of God’s mission. This finds critical expression in that he, “provided purification for sins” (**1.3**). This is our starting point and foundation. It does not end there, however. His mission brings a salvation where, “God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will”(**2.4**). The writer emphasises that although the outcome of the Son’s victory is not yet fully evidenced in all that we see around us, “we do see Jesus, who was made

lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (2.9).

This celebration of the glory and pre-eminence of the Son of God and the atonement he brings about does not, however, cause the writer to distance the Son of God from a humanity that is shared with us. Quite the contrary. Jesus Christ is to be recognised as completely at one with us. Having established the superiority of the Son, who became “a little lower than the angels” (2.7, **Psalm 8.5**), identifying Jesus with the commonality of our shared humanity, the writer goes on to affirm the developmental process that Jesus experiences, by the manner in which he is matured and crowned with glory (2.9). It is in this deeply, kenotic action of identification with us that, according to the author of the Book of Hebrews, brings Jesus to a place where he is perfected (2.10).

Here is no ‘nearly human’ Christ: like us only in appearance, in reality an illusion of shared humanity. Rather, here is a Jesus Christ that enters into our fractured, fragile state as a fully human person, purposefully embracing our suffering and tasting our death, that the presence and power of the Kingdom of God can be anchored among us. Likewise in **Hebrews 5**, we see that it is in embracing and pursuing this kenotic act that Jesus, “learned obedience from what he suffered” (5.8). It was through the experience of suffering that maturity was forged in him, that perfection was completed within his humanity.

The writer to the Hebrews thus manages an incredible feat: he both celebrates the glorious deity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, whilst also emphasising and drawing us to recognise his utter humanity, sharing in our deepest pains, learning obedience through what was suffered, enduring cries and tears (5.7). In calling us to recall Jesus Christ in this way, the writer draws us to see God’s call for us to participate in the kenotic action of Jesus. Jesus did not turn from facing the suffering he would experienced through submitting to the will of his Heavenly Father. Rather, he embraced the way that led him to being shaped and crafted, learning obedience and being perfected in his humanity to become, “the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (5.9).

It is this kenotic obedience that marks Jesus Christ as the One who is truly fitted for anastatic glorification, serving now in the Heavens as the high priest who has offered, once and for all, the perfectly sufficient sacrifice of himself (7.27). He is fully able to save those, “who come to God through him” (7.25). It is this perfection, forged in the Son of God’s humanity as He offered himself in

sacrifice, that has fitted him for this office (**7.28**), by which means he perfects all those who are being made holy (**10.14**).

Experiencing faith, in the Letter to the Hebrews, is characterised as recalling Jesus Christ and what he has done for us, that we might present ourselves to God in kenotic self-offering, adhering to Jesus' words, works and ways. This was the characteristic faith of the people of God who adhered to the covenants of God that prefigured and pointed the way to the coming of Jesus Christ (**Hebrews 11**); and it is through the perfecting that is worked in this kenotic commitment, present in the humanity of Christ, that their humanity together with ours will experience the perfection that is brought about through Jesus Christ (**11.39-40**).

For the writer to the Hebrews, anastatic empowerment is the strengthening of men and women to experience a path of obedience and holiness, towards the final consummation brought about by God (**12.28**). It is an empowerment to persevere and endure.

James

James' concern is that, "believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (**2.1**) become "mature and complete" (**1.4**). The purpose of the narrative of Holy Scripture – which for James and his readers would be the Books of the Old Testament - is not simply that we listen to it. The purpose of the narrative is that we place ourselves in it and become participators, as the people of God, within the narrative of God's redemptive activity. More specifically, while making references to the Old Testament Scriptures, the writer invites his readers to place themselves firmly in a narrative which is, implicitly, the narrative of the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ for, "whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it – they will be blessed in what they do" (**1.22-25**). Experiencing faith that is outworked in our words as well as our actions is emphasised throughout the Letter of James.

How we speak, to and about others, matters. James declares, "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless" (**1.26**). The "law that gives freedom" (**1.25 & 2.12**) leads to the pursuit of values and practices that are commended in the Law of God. This also leads to wisdom being expressed in our lives, characterised by practices that are, "peace-loving, considerate, submissive

....” (3.17). This emphasis on Recall again has a Christ-centred perspective to it, embracing also the example of Abraham (2.20-24) in proving that faith is not simply a cognitive exercise. Faith has to be expressed through the practices of our life.

A focus upon the perfect Law of God calls for us to root ourselves in the will of God. We are not to be ‘double-minded’ (1.6-8), equivocating over our willingness to be faithful. Rather, we are to recognise the importance of repentance as integral to owning true faith: there needs to be renunciation of life ruled simply by our personal desires (1.14). A readiness to surrender ourselves and all that we hold dear, according to our instincts, is vital. Abraham’s readiness to sacrifice Isaac, with the righteousness evidenced in that act, is offered as an example of faith that is properly being worked out (2.21-22). What we practice, not simply opine, matters. In following the path of faith in Jesus’ name our vocation is, “to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (1.27).

An emphasis upon the dignity and perspective of the poor is a special feature of James. The poor, disadvantaged in this world, are enabled in a special way to receive the inheritance of God’s Kingdom. For, “has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?” (2.5). The importance of caring for the poor is accompanied in James with an emphasis on virtuous practices, such as peacemaking (3.17-18) and acts born of humility. “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom” (3.13). When these kenotic actions are engaged in by us, we find that there comes to us an enabling to experience anastatic empowerment: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (4:10).

What arises out of this immersion into the requirements of God’s Law, in desiring to conform to true wisdom, is exemplified in **James 5**, where the prayer of faith is discussed. Here James commends those who together look to harmonise their lives to the way of God. Faith is not to be made into a human effort. It is the prayer of faith, rooted in a life of discipleship exemplified among the elders of the church, that will enable discernment and release anastatic empowerment.

Peter's Letters

We know from the Gospel accounts how much a struggle it was for Peter, in his journey as a disciple, to grasp the values that Jesus Christ embodied. In this regard, so many of us who would follow Jesus Christ today can readily identify with Peter's struggle to conform to Christ. Peter witnessed Jesus speaking the words, performing the works and walking the way that characterises the presence of the Kingdom of God in a human life. What made the difference for Peter was that he realised how special Jesus is. He was captivated by the presence of God expressed in and through the humanity of Jesus Christ, despite the struggles he experienced in seeking to follow him. This is what makes Peter's understanding of the Christian life so important for us today.

1 Peter

A profound understanding of the dynamic expression of the One God as Trinity confronts us at the outset in Peter's letters, where foreknowledge belongs to the Father, active sanctifying is undertaken by the Spirit and, sprinkled by the Son's blood, obedience is rendered by disciples (**1.2**). A proper knowing of God as Creator and Master of all comes about only through a deepening understanding of Jesus Christ His Son, through whom we are enabled to know God as our Father. At the same time, all our present experience and knowledge of both the Father and the Son is actualised by the Holy Spirit. The centre of our response to this God is found in obedience. Obedience itself is a kenotic act wherein we willingly submit to Jesus Christ in his words, works and ways. It requires a knowledge of the Son, that we might recall him.

Our relationship is not to a dead Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus Christ grants us a living hope in a living Lord (**1.3**). An awareness of the anastatic empowering of the Holy Spirit is the ground of our confidence in faith, the Holy Spirit actively at work in our lives, shielding us until full salvation is realised in the last day (**1.5**).

From the beginning of the Letter, we can identify the intertwining of our three focal points in **1 Peter**. Anastatic activity is presently at work in disciples, in that they have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (**1.19**); yet the fullness that we look for, in hope, is not yet here. The sanctifying work of the Spirit, which is an anastatic drawing of us into deeper and deeper conformity and obedience to Jesus Christ, will not reach its conclusion until Jesus Christ returns.

It is with this in mind that ongoing, intentional renunciation needs to take place in Christian living. It was the Spirit of Christ at work in the prophets that told them of the things to come; and it is the Holy Spirit that enables the preaching of the Gospel (**1.11-12**), bringing us into awareness of eternal truths. Peter reminds Christians of their vocation not to conform to evil desires but to be holy, as God is holy (**1.16**). Our lives belong to God's future in Christ, so we are to live now as strangers to this world, "in reverent fear" (**1.17**). Abstaining from sinful desires is integral to our calling (**2.11**). Consequently, we need to renounce attitudes and practices that are inconsistent with the Kingdom of God, that we might continue to grow and develop as disciples (**2.1-3**).

For Peter, this kenotic renouncing on our part is necessary, if we are to properly embrace our anastatic identity in Christ and grow further into it. The issue is not simply one of personal integrity. It is also an issue of effective witness. We have been established by God as, "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" (**2.9**). Only when we renounce debasing and defiling values and practices commonly found in the world, instead recalling and embracing the values and practices espoused by Jesus Christ, will we be effective in witnessing to our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of salvation that comes through him (**2.11-12**).

We will return to the place of suffering in this process in Part 2. For now we note that, for Peter, part of our witness is to endure suffering. Suffering arises out of an ongoing tension and conflict between the accepted values and practices of this world and the values and practices of the Kingdom of God. As we recall what Christ has done for us, so we must embrace the kenotic path to anastatic living that Christ would lead us upon (**2.24-25**). As Christ was ready to suffer, so we also must be ready as we pursue his way (**4.1**).

2 Peter

Peter knew, as an apostle, that there is a difference between believing about Jesus Christ and participating in a life that Jesus came to bring us, draw us into and form in us, as his disciples. As we have been saved from the penalty of sin, so it is that we are presently being saved from the power of sin in our lives through the sanctifying, anastatic activity of the Holy Spirit. Through each moment, we are being drawn towards the day when, fully united with Christ in

the full coming of the Kingdom of God, we will experience what it is to be fully saved from the presence of sin.

We are met here with an understanding of developing our humanity through recalling Christ, renouncing a self-centred life and looking to the enabling, anastatic action of the Holy Spirit at work upon us, in us and through us. This leads Peter to declare, through what has been undertaken by Jesus Christ (**1.1**), that we are able to, “participate in the divine nature” (**1.4**). Given all that we have already noted, we can best understand this as a call for us to give ourselves to a process of having our humanity harnessed more and more to the humanity of Jesus Christ, becoming increasingly transformed and conformed to him. Significantly, it is by this process of participation and transformation that we are enabled to, “escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (**1.4**). It is on the back of this that Peter can then make ethical injunctions, that disciples should pursue values and practices demonstrative of lives that have a true knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Here we see, again, that a proper entry into and engagement in Christian living cannot be reduced to cognitive process and a set of propositions. What matters is a process of recalling, renouncing and refuelling that enables a transformative relationship being formed in us by the One, Triune God. A relationship that is made possible through Jesus Christ. Proper teaching and the embracing of this relationship should lead to experiencing faith, where revelation of the Father is made known through the Son and brought into our lives by the Holy Spirit. Good teaching will invite and draw us into godly behaviour. As Peter goes on to note in **2 Peter 2**, false teaching is associated with immoral behaviour.

In **2 Peter 3** we are reminded of the importance of setting ourselves within a narrative of human life transformed, rooted in Jesus Christ. There is a Day of Judgement. We do not know how close or how distant it might be. For now, we need to apply ourselves to living in a manner that is attentive to the enabling of God and demonstrative of the truth that is in Jesus Christ.

Jude

The concern of Jude is an abandoning of, “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (3). This threat, occasioned by false teachers welcomed by local church, is one of teaching lawlessness, abandoning the ethical and moral norms of the Christian life; and with that, abandoning a recognition of, “Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (4). Put another way, the false teachers were seeking to diminish the importance of a vivid, personal relationship with the ascended Christ, that places him - and the call of conformity to him - at the centre of human living.

There is a subtlety to this. It is possible to recall an aspect of the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, in a manner that is correct; but at the same time, to omit or fail to properly recall other aspects of the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ. For instance, a teacher might focus on Jesus’ healing ministry, his ethical teachings, the atoning sacrifice for sins that Jesus made for us, or his stress on the importance of looking to receive the Holy Spirit: it is possible to look to any one of these as a point of reference to Jesus Christ while, at the same time, ignoring the other parts of his words, works and ways. Such is the work of the false teacher. By failing to recall the fullness of Jesus Christ, the false teacher diminishes appreciation of Jesus Christ and fails to focus upon him as our only Saviour and Lord. The false teacher places greater emphasis on an abstracted aspect of God’s being or identity. For Jude, the focus of knowing God can be found nowhere other than in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jude is acutely aware that Jesus Christ bears the full identity of the God of Israel, who delivered the Hebrews out of Egypt; and that integral to that deliverance is a kenotic renunciation of sexual immorality and perversion (7), accompanied by an anastatic enabling that comes through prayer, “in the Holy Spirit” (20). Indeed, it is depraved instincts that appear to govern the false teachers, showing that they share a similar fate (13) to the rebellious angels (6). Such people demonstrate, by the way they live, an absence of communion with the Holy Spirit (19).

Revelation

The recollection that the Book of Revelation calls us to, at the outset, is a startling one: it is of a glorious Christ, an ascended Lord, radiant in fiery magnificence; and who declares, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I

am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (1.17-18).

What follows in the Book of Revelation is both an injunction and an admonition to remain faithful to this glorious Christ, whom we recall as resurrected through anastatic enabling; and for the various churches to continue to apply themselves to faithfulness, expressed through attentively pursuing a path of kenosis. In the messages to the seven churches, calls to embrace Jesus afresh (2.4-5), turn from immorality (2.14-16; 20-23), awaken to true faithfulness (3.2) and repudiate false confidence in worldly riches (3.17), are all accompanied with an encouragement to persevere when afflicted, impoverished and suffering (2.9-10); and to attend to prayerfulness in the face of weakness (3.8). It is a message that affirms Christ’s readiness to rebuke and discipline, calling people to seek God’s presence and experience intimate communion with him (3.19-20).

The Book of Revelation goes on, from **Revelation 4-6**, to present a vision of anastatic fulfilment: a glimpse into the heavenly throne room, a dimension of living where people are fully brought into the presence of the One God. What then follows, in **Revelation 7-20**, is a visionary description of the ongoing tension and conflict that Christians are caught up in upon Earth, as the fate of a rebellious and faithless world is worked out under the hand of the holy and faithful God, Ruler and Creator of all.

The final two chapters of Revelation look towards a future resolution of present conflicts between the powers of God in Heaven and forces of evil opposed to God. These chapters speak of an anticipated, perfected, future hope; but that future is not altogether distant and remote from us now. At the conclusion of the letters to the churches, in the opening sections of the Book of Revelation, there is the promise of Jesus that, when anyone hears his voice and opens the door to him, he will, “come in and eat with him, and he with me” (3.20). Likewise, after all the horror of what must pass before the full advent of God’s Kingdom fills our present reality, there is the admonition that we should say, “Come!”: an invitation that issues not only from the church, as the bride of Christ; but also an invitation that all may join in, for, “let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.” (22.17).

The Book of **Revelation** reminds us that Christian hope and faith are held out for us to experience, not simply as a proposition or existential ideal to subscribe to. Hope in Christ presents us with the possibility of an experienced reality, of

participation with a now glorified Jesus Christ, who completed his own journey of kenosis and anastasis in worshipful obedience to his Heavenly Father. Moreover, it is in the midst of this kenotic journey of renouncing a self-determined life, recalling and orientating our lives around the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ, that we can be personally met with by Jesus Christ in his anastatic reality; and also come to know relief and help, through drinking from the water of life, which is the intensified coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives now.

Conclusion to Part One

Throughout this first part of our study, we have been seeking to establish how our focus points of Recall, Renounce and Refuel can be traced within the writings of the New Testament. In completing the first part of our journey together, we have traced something of the way these three focal points of 'recall', 'renounce' and 'refuel' resonate through all the Books of the New Testament. We now go on to look at possible implications in pursuing these focus points for experiencing faith today.

Part Two

Embodying a narrative of hope

How can we speak of experiencing faith? Is not faith something to confess, something to believe? The answer is both 'yes' and 'no'. As we have argued, in our overview of the New Testament Books in Part 1, experiencing faith has to begin with Recall, with anamnesis; but it does not end there. Our engagement with God and response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ draws us on from Recall, into both Renounce and Refuel. Faith is developed by engagement with the whole of this tripartite process. Anamnesis, kenosis and anastasis are to be seamlessly connected in our lives, as they are in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

Where, then, is faith birthed? The answer is that faith is birthed out of hope, imparted by grace. Hope arises as we recall the words, works and ways of God and are warmed and wooed by them. When we recognise how all that God had promised and fashioned throughout His dealings with humanity, as witnessed in the Old Testament, points to completeness and fulfilment in and through Jesus Christ, as witnessed to in the New Testament. As the Apostle Paul declares, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God" (**2 Corinthians 1.20**).

The narrative of Jesus evokes hope. His words and his works draw us towards and into involvement with himself. The New Testament witness places hope as the context for the gestation of faith and the generation of love within and among those drawn to Jesus Christ. The Gospels speak of Jesus healing people of sickness and driving out demons. Jesus is the one who brings to us a baptism in the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the door into the presence of God our Father. And critically, the death and resurrection of Jesus indicate to us both the surety of sins forgiven and also an expectation of life that overcomes the power of death. Jesus is the harbinger of hope.

Hope is not simply propositional: it is the seed that burst open to give birth to both faith and love. Such fruitfulness is to abound in us, "the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel" (**Colossians 1.5**). When we

bring to remembrance who the One God is and what He has done, in order to give expression to and herald His rule among us on Earth, we can engage in life through faith and love. We are inspired by hope (**1 Thessalonians 1.3**).

Faith arises out of hope, founded on the covenantal faithfulness of God. It flows out of what we are met with in the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ. As such, healing is a token. Deliverance is a token. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a token. Yet it is in receiving and embracing such tokens of hope, tokens of a fullness to come, that faith is borne: a purposeful participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Such faith is the act of entering into engagement with the presence, purpose and power of God, the One who made covenant with the Patriarchs and who brings the fulfilment of all his promises to us, in and through Jesus Christ.

How might we comprehend faith, if it is contingent on a narrative of hope? Faith can connote a sense of trust, a notion that corresponds to Old Testament, Hebrew meaning. There is not, however, any correspondence between faith and belief, as we construe belief in European, post-Enlightenment thought. Put it another way: faith is not about me and my opinions or ideas, my thoughtful reflections and affirmation of what is true. It is about something birthed out of relationship with the One that I am looking to, the God who proffers me hope. It is about embracing allegiance to and participating in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, through an ongoing process of engaging with Recall, Renounce and Refuel.

In Part 2, we now go on to look at who this One God is, who draws us to experience faith through experiencing His very Being. We look at how this shapes and effects our understanding and experience of community, as well as forming a perspective on suffering as integral to experiencing faith.

Chapter 8

Meeting with the Triune God

While experiencing faith begins with recall, it needs to be recall of the revelation that God has made to us. We do not begin with a blank page or a blank mind. Neither should we confuse thirst or longing to know the One God with any other form of spiritual thirst or openness. We need to be cautious in exposing ourselves to any preternatural or spiritual presence that would come close to or inhabit us. When people are open to anything, anything might come to them: we are not always aware or alert to what might infect or even contaminate us. There are many spiritual powers, angelic and otherwise, that would attach themselves or enter into us, seeking to defile and even destroy those whom God has made in His image and likeness. It is therefore important to focus upon recalling the revelation that God has communicated, centred on Jesus Christ and made known to us through the books of the Bible. We need to focus on the God who reveals Himself in and through the Bible.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One” (**Deuteronomy 6.5**). This is the *Shema*, a basic prayer for God’s people, which God delivered to the people through Moses. It declares that God is singular and indivisible in all that He is and does. It is an affirmation that we have been created by Him and belong to Him and Him alone. It is the confession that He alone is God, that He alone is to be worshipped and adored. This is the God that we are to seek after, whose powerful presence is good to long for and to experience. The Lord is One.

This God is unique. Indivisible. So how is it that the early followers of Jesus began, by the 2nd Century, to speak of God as Triune: the Creator who is made known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit? The answer lies in the experience of God as Trinity, that is to occur within the lives of Jesus Christ’s disciples. Jesus himself spoke of his identity, his Oneness with God as his Father, in affirming that, “I and Father are One” (**John 10.30**). So too the Apostle Paul recognised that, in Jesus Christ, we meet with, “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (**Colossians 1.15**). Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the World. He met with and was recognised by the early disciples, bringing the presence and bearing the identity of God, who is One, into His Creation. God, fully revealed and made known in the flesh and blood of Jesus of Nazareth, is truly God’s Son, “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (**Hebrews 1.3**).

For these early Christians, however, the realisation that God is made fully known in the person of Jesus Christ was not the end of the matter. Indeed, once Jesus Christ had physically departed and had ascended into the Heavens, how would the experienced reality of God be met with and made known to Jesus' disciples? The answer lay in the special relationship that Jesus Christ has with God, as a Son to his Father. It is because of Jesus' relationship to God as his Father that a subsequent, filial relationship with God as our Heavenly Father is made possible for us. Having dealt with the penalty and power of sin through his atoning death and resurrection, Jesus Christ draws us to his own humanity, into his relationship with his Heavenly Father.

Because Jesus Christ became as we are, making himself part of our humanity, the door is opened to our receiving and knowing the experienced presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who comes to us from the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit can now operate in our humanity in a renewed way, able to deal with us in the same way that Jesus Christ knew and experienced in his humanity. Likewise, it is by the Holy Spirit that both our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, God's Son, are made known to us in perfect unity, as One God: this becomes our experienced reality of God. He is the One God who reaches out to us, revealing and making Himself known to us as the Triune God. We meet with the One God who reaches out to us *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit.

In Part 1, we noted that the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, in recording events in the life of the early church, stressed our dependence upon and need of the Holy Spirit. The Acts of the Apostles places a consistent emphasis on the physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit's activity in the lives of the first disciples. Certainly, the role of the Holy Spirit as a teacher is acknowledged: it is by the Holy Spirit that Jesus both taught and instructed his disciples, after his bodily resurrection from the tomb and prior to his ascension into the Heavens (**Acts 1.2**). There, though, we also read that it is the manifest endowment and experiential coming of the Holy Spirit as a violent wind. The Holy Spirit bursts upon the disciples gathered in prayer, vivifying and empowering them to bear witness to the presence of God's Kingdom (**Acts 2.2**). There is a physical shaking of the place where the disciples gather together in prayer, filling them with the Holy Spirit and enabling them to speak out God's Word with boldness (**Acts 4.31**). All this testifies to an experiential meeting with the Living God, the One who is the Creator and sustainer of all.

The Apostle Paul also expected an experienced meeting with the Holy Spirit to be an integral part of our receiving and embracing the Good News of the

Kingdom of God. When Paul first met some of the Ephesian disciples, evangelised and taught by Apollos, a man who, “had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John” (**Acts 18:25**), Paul’s question to these new disciples was, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (**Acts 19.2**).

What did Paul mean in asking this question? What preconceptions were there, in his mind? Was he looking for evidence of a grasp of a concept? Evidence of a spiritual sensation that these disciples could enjoy? Or was there, in his thinking, an expectation of an experienced meeting with God, a meeting that ties in with a recalling of Jesus, leading to a renouncing of self, expressed through Christian baptism?

A helpful insight may be had from Paul’s developed thinking, found in the book of Romans. There, Paul expresses his understanding of a longing that has now been implanted, not only in Christian disciples, but in the whole of Creation. Paul speaks of how the Kingdom of God has been launched into our present experience of reality. It is similar to the way that Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God, recorded in **Matthew 13**. The Kingdom of God is something that is planted and then grows. The Holy Spirit then facilitates a taste, a proleptic anticipation, bringing to our experience an intensified awareness of God’s presence with us. It is this intensified presence of the Holy Spirit that releases an increased longing within us. A longing for the fullness of God’s Kingdom, a fullness that the whole Creation will experience on the day when the glory of God fills all in all and Jesus Christ is recognised and worshipped by all. And it is this longing that leads to increased kenotic expression from within us, as we hunger for a deeper, richer embrace of anastatic reality.

Such a perspective might help us better understand the longing that Paul expresses in **Romans 8.18-39**. The Kingdom of God has been launched upon Earth, implanted like a seed into our lives. This has been brought about through the coming of Jesus Christ to share, through his humanity, in our present experience of reality. Through Recall, the Word of God becomes implanted in our lives, in our humanity. For now, however, we are in a transition period. The Kingdom has been planted in our midst and is growing and spreading through those who embrace, in their humanity, communion with the crucified and now risen, living Jesus Christ. Growth and expression of the Kingdom of God has begun and is being relayed through our lives. The Creation, however, is still ravaged for now by the problems and pathologies that arise out of human sin.

The Creation itself groans, as we groan, longing for what is yet to come in its fullness. We might say that we are living in an interval between Jesus Christ first bringing the Kingdom of God into a broken world; and the fulfilment of a coming reality, in the full realisation of all the dimensions of the Kingdom of God in our experience.

Jesus Christ emphasised, through all he did and said during his life and ministry, his coordination with and dependancy upon his Father in Heaven's will. In so doing, he demonstrated and pointed to how his life was synchronised with the Holy Spirit. This is how we come to meet with the One, Triune God: we do so through our experiencing faith. When we, in the humanity we share with Jesus Christ, are drawn into the Son's relationship with his Heavenly Father through the workings of the Holy Spirit.

In this dynamic action of the One, Triune God in dealing with us, we note how Jesus expressed his communion with the Holy Spirit. The Gospel accounts tell us that Jesus Christ used three, basic analogies: wind, spring and river.

The Holy Spirit is like a Wind

Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as a wind, in his nighttime meeting with Nicodemus, a leading Pharisee. There, in speaking of the need to be born again, Jesus compares the coming of the Spirit to the wind, declaring that, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (**John 3.8**). We have no control over the Holy Spirit. Like the wind, we cannot control when His presence is felt upon us or when that sense of presence ceases. An awareness of this sharpens our sense of dependency on God and of contingency on His will. The experienced presence of the Holy Spirit is the sovereign action of the One God, acting upon and manifesting His presence to us.

The Holy Spirit is like a Spring

The presence of the Holy Spirit is also to be understood as implanted within us. The Holy Spirit comes to stay with us, rising up as a spring of water within us. The Holy Spirit is not whimsical in dealing with us. We cannot control the Holy Spirit, yet the Holy Spirit comes to reside within us, in a dynamic and fluid way. In speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus explained, "whoever

drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (**John 4.14**). An explanation of this indwelling is expanded by Jesus when he is in Jerusalem, at the Festival of Tabernacles. Jesus observes that, “Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them” (**John 7.38**). The Gospel writer goes on to note, “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (**John 7.39**). Two points might be noted from these words of Jesus Christ.

Firstly, it is through Jesus that the Holy Spirit is given to people, in this indwelling and fluid way. There is a direct relationship between entering relationship with Jesus Christ, who himself was full of the Holy Spirit throughout his ministry on Earth, and our receiving the Holy Spirit. Jesus made it clear that the only way for us to know God as Father is through the Son (**Luke 10.22**). Our receiving of Jesus is realised within us by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to us in a special way, from the Father and through the humanity of the Son: there is no other, secret backdoor to receiving this special indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Just as we can only come to God our Father through Jesus Christ, His Son, so we can only know and experience this special indwelling of the Holy Spirit when we seek and receive it through coming into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Secondly, it is the Holy Spirit who works in and through Jesus’ disciples. As the Holy Spirit enabled the ministry of Jesus (**Luke 4.18-19**), the Holy Spirit manifests and bring the presence of the Kingdom of God into our present experience. The Holy Spirit demonstrated a special intensity of presence in the humanity of Jesus Christ. As healing power went out from him (**Luke 8.46**), Jesus now makes it possible for the same to happen through us. For this reason, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they had received, “power from on high” (**Luke 24.49**). They were to look and long for the Holy Spirit’s enabling, fluid presence and empowering.

The Holy Spirit is like a River

This emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s fluidity, likened to a river, evokes strongly the metaphor of God’s saving and vivifying presence, as expressed in the prophecy of **Ezekiel 47**. There, the image is of a river of life-enabling blessing flowing out from the Temple in Jerusalem, the Temple signifying the dwelling of God among us, here on Earth. So it is that today, it is from the place of God’s dwelling among

us that the fluid movement of His transforming, fruit-enabling presence comes to arid and barren places. Flowing from among the disciples of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit enables the ministry of the Kingdom of God to flow out into the World. This river-metaphor is repeated in the Book of Revelation, where again we see a spring of water that issues from the glorified Jesus (**Rev 21.6**), flowing out from there in life-giving, irrigating power (**Rev 22.1-2**).

The Holy Spirit comes to us, in this powerful, indwelling manner, through the glorified Lord Jesus. As we have noted from **John 7.39**, the Spirit would not visit upon us in this special way until Jesus was glorified; but now, ascended into the Heavens, he is enabled to pour out the Spirit in fulfilment of the prophecy of **Joel 2.28-32**, as recognised and proclaimed by the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2.33**). We are now able to receive anastatic empowerment poured into our lives by the Holy Spirit.

The breath of peace

In the light of these observations, how can we best appreciate what occurred in the Upper Room, following his resurrection, when Jesus breathed upon the gathered disciples (**John 20.19-23**)? In what sense was Jesus communicating or imparting something significant to them, as he breathed on them, telling them to receive the Holy Spirit? Was this simply a symbolic enactment of what would later occur on the day of Pentecost; or was it something more immediate? When we combine an understanding of the dynamic way that the One God communicates and relates to us, in a movement that is *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit, together with an understanding of the Holy Spirit dealing with us in fluid ways, we might conclude that this was indeed a measure of impartation of the Holy Spirit to the disciples; not in terms of power, but in a manner that affirmed and imparted a *Shalom*, a wholesome peace, from Jesus to them.

In my own experience and ministry, I have seen such a *Shalom* come upon church gatherings at different times and places, sometimes in Sunday services, at other times in small groups gathered for teaching or worship of God. On these occasions, people have experienced an atmosphere of peace descending upon them: a wholesome peace, without any prompting or manipulation of emotion. With, at times, a spontaneous sense of wonder that can fill us with joy and even draw out tears. Peace, a characteristic of God's ruling presence. God visiting with us. The presence of Heaven interacting with our own, experienced reality in this

world. Quite different from a manifestation of the Holy Spirit's presence in a powerful way: a breath, rather than a mighty wind.

In the next chapter, we go on to explore further some of the ways in which we might look to experience the presence of this God, the One who is the Triune God, who meets with us. Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Chapter 9

Experiencing Faith

So far, in the introduction to this second part of our study, we have rehearsed how experiencing faith requires us to enter a narrative of hope, found in the Bible and centred on Jesus Christ. We have observed that experience of God arises within the context of a hope focussed upon recalling how God has dealt with His people in the past; and how, ultimately, His present dealing with us is defined by what happened in through the person of Jesus Christ. In the last chapter, we rehearsed the identity of God, the One God who meets with us *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit. We saw that we might speak of meeting God in terms of dynamic influence and fluidity, by the manner in which the Person of the Holy Spirit operates. God works in and through us, that the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit might irrigate and refresh, bringing new life in Jesus' name.

We also saw that our experience of God arises out of our communion with God, enabled through the humanity that we share with Jesus Christ. We can experience the One God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit because the Son of God, who is also the Word of God, came to inhabit our humanity. Our knowledge of God as Father arises out of Jesus Christ's relationship to God as Father. Our experience of the Holy Spirit arises out of Jesus Christ's experience of the Holy Spirit. Everything we can know and experience of God and His ways is rooted in Jesus Christ's humanity, when our humanity is aligned to the humanity of Jesus. We pursue this through our focus points. We need to begin by recalling the Word of God.

Recalling the Word of God

Our experience of God is rooted in the humanity of the Son of God. Our part in sharing in that humanity is expressed in the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ. Our experience of God is also rooted in Jesus' identity as the Word of God, as celebrated in **John 1.14**: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth". The Word is, quite literally, logical: the New Testament word here, describing Jesus as the Word, is *Logos*. At the same time, the Word of God is vested in the very flesh of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is

uniquely both the Son of God and the Word of God: the two are one and the same.

Today, the Holy Scriptures are frequently referred to, collectively, as the Word of God. Jesus is the unique Word of God. Are the Scriptures then the same as Jesus? Most certainly not, for Jesus is both the Word of God and the Son of God. So if not the same, how might we best describe the relationship between the Bible and Jesus?

The Holy Scriptures, when opened to us and applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit, serve as the God-breathed Word of God speaking into our lives: glorifying God, testifying to the salvation brought to us and guiding us into a deeper participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. The Holy Scriptures are useful, “for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (**2 Timothy 3.16-17**) .

Are the Holy Scriptures singularly and completely authoritative? Most certainly; but absolute authority belongs to Jesus Christ alone. Holy Scripture is authoritative: Jesus is the sole and absolute authority. Indeed, Holy Scripture testifies that Jesus himself claims that all authority belongs to him:

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” **Matthew 28.18-20**

In matters of authority, concerning all that God has created, our Lord Jesus Christ has supremacy:

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” **Colossians 1.15-18**

God, through the action of the Holy Spirit, opens our eyes to recognise the truth and nature of our salvation, by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. This is radiated through the Holy Scriptures. We might phrase this by saying that the Holy Scripture is the ultimate, authoritative testimony to Jesus Christ, through whom we meet with our heavenly Father and receive the infilling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, working newness of life in us.

Through Holy Scripture, we meet with the authoritative revelation of God that beckons and leads us to recognise Jesus Christ as the complete revelation of the Word of God. This call to recognise the Word of God is a call to anamnesis, recalling God's revelation given to us in the Bible, drawing us into a path that leads into kenosis and anastasis. It is by our inhabiting our humanity in a manner that conforms to Jesus Christ, guided by Holy Scripture, that we are led into participating in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

Is it appropriate, then, to speak of the revelation of God in Holy Scripture as experiencing God? Yes it is. A vital aspect of experience, for us as human beings, is cognitive recognition. When we look to the Bible, we are confronted with revelation that communicates to us, through our intellectual process. Jesus is the Word of God become human, so the Bible communicates the logic of all that is in Jesus Christ to us. However, whilst the Bible gives us the canon, or measuring line, of all God's communication to us, God's ability to communicate revelation by other means, complementary to Holy Scripture and conforming to Jesus Christ, is not preempted or negated. Even a cursory reading of the Bible makes it clear that God communicates with us through the wonder of all Creation, through angelic visitations and also by an intense, personal visitation of His Holy Spirit upon and into our lives.

God has created us so that, complimentary to our cognitive recognition, we might know Him by other, affective means. God has fashioned us, in His Image, that we might apprehend Him both cognitively and affectively. As well as speaking to us through the Bible, God communicates to us through phenomena and through our non-cognitive senses. Recognising the complimentary nature of both cognitive and affective processes is important for us to grasp, for the fullness of God's communication comes through the full humanity of Jesus Christ. We see, through his words, works and ways, the outworking of full cognitive and affective communion with God, expressed through Jesus Christ's humanity. In embracing us in our humanity, through the humanity of Jesus Christ, God communicates to us both by cognitive and affective means. So it is that we, with all our senses, might look to worship and honour Him.

What might it look like, to experience God in our humanity, as Jesus did in his? Where we begin by recalling from the Bible the words, works and way of Jesus Christ, we should also apply ourself to appropriate, affective means of relating and communicating with God. We will give further consideration of ways to engage with the Bible in the next chapter. Now we look to explore further how our focus points of Recall, Renounce and Refuel might help us in developing our affective senses in experiencing God.

Affective Experience of God

Affective experience of God, through attentiveness to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives expressed through our non-cognitive senses, has been integral to shared experience of the One God since the birth of the church. This has been expressed, principally, in the sacramental practices of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We begin our reflection on how God communicates affectively to us here, going on to note some other traditional practices within church. In beginning with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, we note how these two practices convey a focus that is both anamnestic and kenotic, drawing us into a place where we might more fully experience the anastatic workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

A word of caution, though. In looking to identify affective experience in the sacraments, we need to be careful not to reduce our description of these to simply cognitive propositions. That would be self-defeating, in terms of identifying helpful, affective experiences. Our recognition of affective experience, communicated by the use of sacraments, must remain something of a mystery. On the other hand, whilst emphasising the sense of mystery in the communion with Jesus Christ that takes place in and through the sacraments, we should not thereby strip them of what is emphasised, in Scripture, as recognisable and helpful in our experience.

Experiencing Baptism

Baptism involves water. Lots of it, usually. Whether poured onto or encompassing us, it communicates a profoundly sensory experience. In believers' baptism, when we are engulfed by water, lowered down and momentarily cut off from air and breathing, there is an enactment of what the

Apostle Paul describes, in his Letter to the Romans, “that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (**Romans 6:3-4**). The action of baptism brings all three of our focus points together, for baptism is a vivid recall of what Jesus entered into and endured for our salvation; a renouncing of life lived without Jesus Christ as Lord; and an expression of our dependancy on being enabled and refuelled, in the power of Jesus Christ’s resurrection, to live a life set apart to God. Baptism draws us into a synchronised representation of anamnesis, kenosis and anastasis, through participating in the life, death and victory of Jesus Christ.

Experiencing the Lord’s Supper

Where baptism normally occurs only once for us, marking our embarkation on a journey of discipleship, the Lord’s Supper is shared again and again throughout the Christian journey. Our celebration of the Lord’s Supper summons us to Recall, Renounce and Refuel, through its richly sensory experience of eating and drinking. In the Lord’s Supper there is sharing together of bread and wine with other disciples. In this way we take the Lord Jesus Christ to ourselves, his body and blood represented in the bread and in the wine shared together.

The first Lord’s Supper was integrated into the Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples, recalling the power of God’s redemptive initiative, in calling and taking His people out of captivity in Egypt and into a journey of deliverance. Focal to this act of recall was the sharing of the meat of the passover lamb and unleavened bread among the people, taken hurriedly before embarking on a journey out of bondage into freedom. In this regard, the Lord’s Supper, arising out of the context of the Passover meal, marks our commitment to sharing in a journey of discipleship, out of bondage to sin and into a future punctuated by the rule of Christ and the outworking of the Kingdom of God in our lives. The Lord’s Supper is also an act of renouncing: turning away from the false gods and disowning the way of life that characterised ancient Egypt. It is a renouncing of the familiar in order to embark on a journey out of bondage, where our hope is focussed on God’s faithfulness in enabling and supplying His people for life, refuelling them.

There is more, though. As earlier noted, the Apostle Paul declared that, in taking the bread and wine, we, “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (**1**

Corinthians 11.26). Participation in the Lord's Supper does more than receive: it is an act of proclamation, our joint recommissioning as Christ's disciples. Through the affective means of eating and drinking the bread and wine, our participation in the body and blood of Jesus Christ, we express our fealty to Jesus Christ and commitment to his cause: the cause of advancing the Kingdom God and the renewal and transformation of the Earth and all Creation, by God's mighty power.

As with the Passover Meal, the Lord's Supper both celebrates God's faithfulness in working redemption and deliverance in our lives; and also acts to recommission disciples. It is an affective expression of taking Jesus Christ to ourselves, receiving and recommitting, acknowledging that we are people consecrated to living out our life as a participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ himself.

The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are central to Christian tradition. The following are also practices, long established in giving expression to affective communion with God.

Experiencing Testimony

A valuable practice of Recall is found in the sharing of personal testimony, either through written autobiography or by speaking out within the context of a church gathering. The focus lies in telling of the circumstances that led to a personal openness to and receiving of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. This is normally accompanied by an account of the difference and changes that have followed, in the new disciples's life. In the telling, it is not uncommon for emotion to be expressed, as experiences are recalled and relived.

Personal testimonies excite hope in people. People can hear of how God has acted, in drawing one person into life with Jesus Christ and, thereby, igniting hope that God might do similar things in other lives. Congregations are often enthralled and deeply appreciative of testimonies, as they resonate with experiences in the lives of listeners. Testimonies are accounts that recall experiences of meeting with God, of repentance and renunciation, being filled with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and moving forward along the path of discipleship.

Experiencing Prayer

How might we best respond to the revelation of God, met with in Creation, focussed through Holy Scripture, centred on Jesus Christ? Prayer, spoken out as Jesus taught his disciples, begins in adoration and develops into invitation to and invocation of God:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven” (**Matthew 6.9-10**).

Foundational to what Jesus taught his disciples was the need to look with expectation to the realisation of God’s covenant faithfulness: focussing on what God had promised would be accomplished. Jesus encouraged this expectation in the life of his followers. As we emphasised in the preceding chapter, the One, Triune Creator reaches out to us *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit. It is in and through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit that God is active in our lives. Jesus, we saw, spoke of the Holy Spirit as Wind, a Spring within us, a River flowing from us; and when he breathed on them, he told the disciples to receive the Holy Spirit, as well as telling them to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. Jesus, when he spoke of the Holy Spirit, did so in words that conveyed an anticipation of affective experience. So it is that Christian prayer involves an act of recall, followed by an invitation for God to come, through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is to be rooted in a readiness to receive and experience the coming of the presence of God and the execution of His will upon Earth.

We will return to discuss further implications of this in Part 3. For now, we simply note that prayer, as Jesus teaches it, does not begin with supplication or intercession. Supplication and intercession are important; yet they follow on the priority of inviting our Heavenly Father to express His rule and His presence in our lives.

Experiencing Praise

The practice of singing and playing musical instruments, in praise of God, is embedded in traditions of Christian worship. The singing of psalms and songs of praise is evidenced in both Old Testament and New Testament literature. Music is a profoundly affective means of communication, one that is central to the experience of many Christians, especially now when access to songs and music is so readily available. Indeed, the presence of a choir, a soloist, or a praise band

led by a worship leader has been a feature of Christian gatherings for many years. Sermons, more often, have become shorter; and time given over to praise through song and music has been much extended.

In recent years, the content of Christian hymnody has changed. New songs are often highly repetitive, with less doctrinal content than would have been common in the past. Songs often express love and longing for God and for more of His presence and power to be experienced. The practice of praise has become increasingly an affective practice, a way whereby we look to experience the presence of God, in worship.

God looks to reach into us, to fill us and transform us to be His people. He wants to indwell the community of His people. It is to the nature of this community that we turn to now.

Chapter 10

Experiencing Faith in Community

Recognition and ownership of the pattern and example that are in Christ Jesus cannot simply be left hanging as an exhortation. Practices have to be pursued and enacted. There has to be delivery. Community is a context through which this can happen. Good, positive, affirming and functioning community. Community, established and pursued in Jesus' name, that people can be part of, in order to explore and develop together in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. This takes time and space. It is a journey for those of us who are already disciples, as much as it is for those who have enquiring questions, considering embarking on the Christian life. We look to the pattern that is in Jesus and for the intensified presence of the Holy Spirit to be at work within us, to transform and mould us into people together: a community that exists in Jesus' name, offering worship to our Heavenly Father.

What does it mean, then, to be a community? We might begin by saying that a Christian community exists to be the dwelling place of God among people on Earth. Inhabiting a place and a space. There are clear precedents found in the Bible, of places and spaces where God meets with people in a special, intensified way. The Tabernacle, in the wilderness journeyings of the escapees from Egypt. The Temple in Jerusalem, established by King Solomon. Jesus himself, the Word of God fully occupying a human body. And now the church, a community of Jesus' people. Each of these places and spaces occupying a located, physical presence, here on Earth. Each of these, in their season, serving as a place and space whereby the One God meets with people. Through the ministry of each located, physical presence, God touches lives with grace and mercy. Each a conduit of the presence and the power of the One God reaching out to us, *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit.

The church serves as a temple of God's presence, built upon the cornerstone of Jesus. Through the church we are brought to function as parts that participate together in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Jesus declared, "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (**Matthew 18.20**). 'In my name': it is important that Jesus' intentionality is at the heart of church. Intentionality was integral to what Jesus pursued through his words, works and ways. That intentionality is given expression in us through Recall, Renounce and Refuel.

The One God favours plurality. The post-Enlightenment, European perception of a person as an individual, severable and separate from others, is foreign to norms of Biblical thought. Although we might, in our contemporary culture, readily be drawn to the notion of each of us existing as self-determining individuals, it is not part of a Biblical mindset. We can better understand ourselves when we admit to being formed as highly relational creatures, designed to function alongside others, as people who gain identity and purpose through affirming relationships. We function best in community with others. We are persons who are fashioned to live and function in plurality. As Israel was called to be, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (**Exodus 19.6**), so this is the identity we are assigned by God, in and through our inclusion in the life of Israel’s Messiah, Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of Christian community.

What, however, is to be the shape of Christian community? Is there an optimum number of people for effectively pursuing God’s purposes together? What convictions, virtues, values and practices are essential to communal identity? What is incidental or even a distraction from the healthy functioning of a Christian community?

Sadly, there are people who give up on church, or even seeking to follow Jesus, because they are disappointed, hurt or rejected in their experience of church as community. In what follows, we will seek to map out a better understanding of church as community. We will look to marry realism with legitimate aspiration. We will do so by applying our three focus points of Recall, Renounce and Refuel to our exploration of what it means to be a community who experience faith together. In the next three chapters we explore what it might mean to be God’s dwelling place, to pursue plurality and to establish what is essential to communal identity. Later, in Part 3, we will reflect on what all this might mean for developing an understanding of gifting and ministry; pursuit of discipleship development; and engaging in mission.

Chapter 11

Community and Recalling

What does it mean to be God's dwelling place and to say that God favours plurality; and what are the essentials we need to hold to, as community? What is it that we need to recall?

God's Dwelling Place

Jesus's messianic calling involved bringing to fulfilment the covenantal promises of God, to the people God had elected for this purpose: Israel. It is important to recall that Israel was constituted on the grounds of God's covenants to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God made promises. They come to complete fulfilment in and through Jesus Christ (**2 Corinthians 1.20**).

God's promise to Abraham was to multiply him, making him into a great nation, whereby, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (**Genesis 12.3**). This covenantal intentionality of God is worked out through subsequent covenants made with Isaac and Jacob, extending through to establishing, under the leadership of Moses, the people of Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. It was in pursuit of this objective that God declared to David that, "your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me" (**2 Samuel 7.16**). This is the significance of Jesus' lineage, as a descendent of David. Jesus came to establish a community that would be blessed of God, in order to be a blessing to the whole world.

To fulfil their commission the people of God are to be, first and foremost, a people whose identity is marked by the worship and presence of the One God. That identity is fulfilled through the person of Jesus Christ. Everything about Jesus is characterised by the worship and presence of the One God. His desire is to see the liberating and fulfilling rule of God extended among all people. This meant bringing into human life the abundant love, justice and righteousness that God desires to establish in humanity; and, consequently, a renouncing among mankind of styles of living, whether religious or secular, that fail to honour God and resist His desire to embrace us. The self-awareness of Jesus, during his ministry on Earth, was rooted in this. In bearing the abundant love, justice and righteousness that God has for us, his invitation to disciples was

simply, 'Come, follow me'. It was an invitation to participate in a holy life in worship of God, enjoying and bearing God's saving love to others.

It is through recalling God's covenants and the realisation that their fulfilment is brought about through Jesus Christ, that church today can be inspired to act and deliver what God desires. This is a summons to hope. To become a community that enacts God's story and manifests His glory. It is to be a different story from that lived out by the rest of the world. Because of the words, works and ways of Jesus, we live with the knowledge that life in this present existence is not as God wants it to be. As surely as the Son of God came to Earth, bearing God our Father's love to us, he will return to usher in the fullness of God's Kingdom, the renewal of Heaven and Earth. For now, by the intensified presence and infilling of the Holy Spirit, we can begin to live out this Jesus story. The Holy Spirit enables us to live as a community that holds to hope.

Holding to hope in our lives, issuing from and expressed in the covenant intentionality of the One who reaches us *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit, allows faith and love to be birthed and rise among us. It is this hope, faith and love that distinguishes us as the community that bears the presence of God into the world. Through God's covenant faithfulness, grafting us into life in Jesus Christ (**John 15.1-17**), we are enabled to be the dwelling place of God on Earth (**1 Peter 2.9-10**). We are to recall that God wants the church to be His dwelling place.

God favours plurality

Everyone matters to God. To say that God favours plurality is not to discount His care and concern for each person. There is a real need in this increasingly segmented, separated culture for people to know, in their unique personhood, the love and care God has and feels towards them. We should, however, also affirm the value of each person by perceiving and placing each person within a bigger picture. Created by God as relational beings, we find our fulfilment when we understand our personhood is enhanced by relating to and caring for others. Human relationships that love, affirm and nurture – releasing us to love, affirm and nurture others - is the path of life that God wants us all to enjoy.

This was certainly the case for the people of Israel. They were a community fashioned through the covenant promises that God gave to Abraham to become a people formed to live to the praise of God's glory; a characteristic and identity

that drew Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all into deeper relationship with God. It was out of this identity, of belonging to a different God from the gods of Egypt and the nations they met thereafter, that shaped Israel. Led by Moses, the Hebrew people experienced redemption and release from captivity. God took the liberated captives on a journey, through which there came a deeper revelation and knowing of God, carved out in their wilderness wanderings. There was yet further revelation of God and His desires for them imparted at Mount Sinai. The people of Israel had been given the name Israel, which means 'he wrestled with God', through the experience of Jacob in wrestling with the Angel of God at Peniel (**Genesis 32.28**). Collectively, they were being shaped and fashioned into an identity that would reflect the glory and goodness of God. It was through a process of honing and shaping that Israel was being fitted to be the bearer and expression of God's covenant intentionality.

The story to be traced throughout the Old Testament books is, in large measure, a story of Israel's wrestling with God; and their failure to submit to Him, that they might be shaped as God's people. In this regard, our appreciation of the experience of the characters we meet with in the Old Testament comes through understanding the significance of each person as part of a plurality, an integrated group of people. The people of Israel were called to possess a distinctive identity, separate from other peoples. They were to be a people whom God was working among, shaping and fashioning their collective identity, in order that Israel might become the means of God's redemptive love being mediated to all the peoples of the world. This is the type of community that we are to recall.

Jesus, from the outset of his ministry, looked to gather to himself a renewed community. In calling together his disciples, he gathered a group that needed shaping. In some ways, they were a really dysfunctional bunch of people. Different backgrounds. Different temperaments. Some boastful. Some dishonest. Some with very low self-esteem. People like you and me. People gathered by God to be, collectively, disciples of Jesus Christ. To grow and develop together, sharing in Jesus' life and ministry and being led into participation in his victory. We are to recall that God favours plurality.

Community Essentials

Community can be a very rich or very superficial experience: either thick or thin. Thick, where relationships are fuller and complex, people relating and sharing

together in many ways. Some communities will function as communes; thick relationships woven into the lives of people among whom finance, food and accommodation are shared. At the other extreme, communities will be much thinner when only a few convictions and practices are held in common and enacted together.

Is a church where people gather together on a Sunday, sitting in rows, experiencing very little interpersonal contact and looking to a presentation before them, a thick or thin community? Relative to other communities that people engage with throughout their week, such a gathering may be either thick or thin. For some, their immediate family, workplace or recreative space would provide a far thicker experience of community than their local church.

So what are the essential indicators of church, as community? In the Christendom context, preaching and sharing in the sacraments would often be viewed as central. In addition, the practices of communal praise and prayer might well be valued. Now, in a post-christendom context, it is also likely that gathering in a conversational context, where shared thoughts and feelings are exchanged and where creative expression is communicated, will often occur. This is church as community, gathering to recall the stories of the Bible, exploring and sharing a calling and commission to be and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

In engaging in this process of recall, it is likely that the Bible will play an important part. But what part? In what way does our expression of community affect our engagement with the Bible?

Community and the Bible

One component that affects our use of the Bible, arising out of the legacy of the Protestant Reformation and its strong emphasis on the centrality of Biblical teaching and preaching, is the high value placed on an able Biblical expositor who will also likely serve the local congregation as a caring pastor. This legacy would favour an understanding of church that focusses on gathering to hear the proclamation of the Word of God. Given the influence of Protestant thought in churchmanship over the past five hundred years, that this feature is integral to much of church life should not surprise us. At the same time, the theological and ecclesial components of a Protestant heritage, adjusted to allow for an understanding of local church independence and the substitution of believer's

baptism for infant baptism, have in recent years been affected by an enhanced appreciation of the Anabaptist tradition.

Anabaptist perspectives and emphases were given room to incubate during the breakdown of enforced, ecclesial uniformity within the Holy Roman Empire and the emergence of separated, European states in the late Middle Ages, in the period known as the Reformation. At that time there was an opportunity for non-conformity and divergent theological and ecclesial expressions to flourish and grow. Under the protection of emerging regional rulers and city states across central and northern Europe, Lutheran and Reformed perspectives prospered, giving rise to a new form of conformity yoked to localised, civic powers. Hence the designation given to John Calvin and Martin Luther as 'magisterial reformers': their ecclesial convictions and structures enjoyed the support of local, civil magistrates. Anabaptist expressions of church, on the other hand, were non-conformist, often experimental in giving expression to Biblical perspectives; and not unusually attracting persecution from conformist traditions, whether Roman, Lutheran or Reformed.

When baptist churches appeared in Britain, anabaptist convictions were present yet not easily quantifiable in church life. All early British baptists, even those with a Reformed theological perspective, were deemed non-conformist. In more recent times, distinctives within anabaptist thought and practice have attracted greater attention. These distinctives included an emphasis on the Bible as self-interpreting; a radical focus on the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ, in addition to Christ's self-giving as a redemptive sacrifice; and a stress on the activity of the Holy Spirit's enabling for ministry across the whole membership of the local congregation. A consequent convergence, in recent years, of both Reformed and Anabaptist traditions has resulted in a challenging dialogue, as two sets of sometimes competing emphases have invited a new synthesis of theological conviction and ecclesial practice.

A second component is the practice of communal discernment: a stress that revelation of the will of God is to be discerned collectively by those professing Christ and gathering together as local church. Given the different distinctives of conformist and non-conformist churchmanship, a precise relationship between the authority of the preached message and the collective discernment of the congregation has, in practice, been hard to define; but the distinguishing emphasis that it is the gathered community and not simply the preacher that discerns the will of God and how it is to be responded to is tacitly acknowledged.

To what measure this common discernment might apply to the exposition and application of Holy Scripture, we will return to later.

A third component is the present means of God redemptively imparting new life to us. The Methodist revival of the eighteenth century, Holiness Revivals in the nineteenth century, the Pentecostal revival of the early twentieth century and the Charismatic Renewal of the late twentieth century have had a significant effect on much of church life. Revivals have led to an enhanced awareness and emphasis on the revelatory and impartational action of the Holy Spirit in dealing with us. This has raised further challenge and questions within the Western, Christendom context, as to where and how the activity of the Holy Spirit is to be acknowledged and nurtured among us. Traditionally, it has been located primarily in sacramental practice and in preaching. Precisely where and how the Holy Spirit may be celebrated as ministering, other than in the practices of preaching, the Lord's Supper and baptism, has not been easily or readily articulated. An exclusive focus on preaching and sacraments, stretching back in Christendom to before the Reformation, is still evident in many churches, even in a post-Christendom, secular context.

All this has created a complex picture as to the way the Bible is engaged with, as we look to recall. We need to make good use of the Bible in our life as church. We recall. We need to be refuelled. In order to get there, we need to renounce. This is what we turn to explore now.

Chapter 12

Community and Renouncing

Church as a place and space where we renounce. Not simply repent, but renounce. It is more likely that we will think of church as a gathering to recall the teachings of the Bible and to be refuelled in our faith. Yet renunciation is a vital focus for us too, if we are to enact what we recall from the Bible and go on to be refuelled for effective and faithful living as a community of God's people. Hopeful, joyful, fruitful Christian living is our goal! For this we need to intentionally renounce.

A core practice in renouncing is rooting ourselves in prayer. Prayer that expresses our emptiness and our need to be visited, rescued and enabled by God, again and again. It is the prayer we make when we first invite Jesus to be Lord of our life, turning to acknowledge Jesus as Saviour. It is the prayer we express when we recall that we are to be part of Christ's community, the dwelling place of God. It is the prayer that confesses our utter need and desire for the mighty, sovereign God to come and make Himself known, in us, among us and through us to others. There is a need to prayerfully renounce, when seeking to be visited by God, the distractions and vanities that steal and occupy our time, preventing us from seeking after the One God in prayer. We need to acknowledge our emptiness and humble ourselves. And we need to express this in prayer when we gather as community.

There is also a need for each of us to self-empty, to come to terms with the fact that our lives are not just about 'me'. It is so easy to forget the Biblical pattern of revelation that invites us to recall that God's interest is not simply in separate individuals but in a plurality of persons, formed to be a community of people within which each will function as an integral part. Our contemporary culture does not tutor us well in this. Yet growing into greater Christlikeness requires renunciation of personal preoccupations and cultivating an awareness of others around us. This is at odds with much of what we are told and taught by contemporary media. It seems to deny the priority of personal fulfilment. And that is exactly right. Each of us must learn to renounce self, affirming instead with the Apostle, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (**Galatians 2.20**). A failure to do so may have played a significant part in the demise of faithful living and commitment to church as thick

community, whereby a stronger and more effective witness within contemporary society might be brought to bear.

So we begin with prayer. But praying for what? Prayer that begins by expressing our own needs may well be sincere; but is not prayer as taught by Jesus. Don't mistake me: prayer that is born out of pain or need and a desperate invocation of deity to help and rescue us; this is not to be disparaged. However, the only time the disciples asked Jesus to teach them anything was when they asked him to teach them how to pray. Jesus' response was to teach them to begin by recalling the nature of the One God we worship and to adore Him; and then to proceed to request that God might cause His rule to come on Earth and for His will to be done among us. Jesus taught that we are to look to God, inviting Him to exercise His authority in our lives and to unleash His will on Earth, in and through us.

This is why, if we are to establish a Christ-centred community, we need to begin with kenosis. Without kenosis we might establish a club with religious interests and practices; but it will not effectively represent the body of Christ. It will not be church. For Jesus Christ to be manifested in and through us, we need to establish the practice of renouncing self and inviting the presence and purpose of God to come among us, to take us, shape us and express His presence through us as Christ's community.

We now look at three areas where the challenge of kenosis needs to be engaged. Firstly, in addressing accountability and the temptation to isolationism and retreat from relationships. Secondly, in hearing God's Word, living under Christ's authority and resisting the temptation of listening only to ourselves. Thirdly, the need to deal with the idol of performative church and a draw to consumerism. In looking at these areas, we will also touch on how we deal with interpersonal conflict and further explore our communal use of the Bible.

Accountability and the temptation of isolationism

Contemporary culture insists on the right of every person to choose and pursue an identity and lifestyle that fulfils them, so long as it does not harm or threaten the *status quo*. Patterns of lifestyle, reflected in the demise of both nuclear and extended family living together, favour the pursuit of individual preferences and divergent pathways. In radical contrast to this is the model of community that Christ calls us into.

Christ's community recognises that each person exists for and in relationship with others. That relationship is to be both a relationship with God and with other people. Our Christian identity finds expression through the relationships we engage in with other people. It is in the context of church that we are to be nurtured and developed into being the people that God wants us to be. To own this requires renunciation. Renunciation of false identities woven into the fabric of secular society's values. Renunciation is a necessary step towards each of us discovering our true identity as a part of the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ.

Our true identity, founded in a relationship with God as our Heavenly Father and with people who are around us, needs to be rooted in Christ. It is through belonging to a community focussed on pursuing and practising the words, works and way of Jesus Christ that we can be reshaped into Christian disciples. Through this process we discover ourselves to be an integral part of God's dwelling place on Earth, as God our Father expresses Himself, through His Son and by His Holy Spirit, into our lives.

This is an engagement with God and with others that we instinctively resist. Why? Because there is a part of us that does not want to die to self in this way. The presence of sin within us struggles and wrestles against this call to be reshaped, to become part of the body of Christ. Self-assertion is more naturally attractive to us than accountability to God and to others. As with Israel of old where, "everyone did as he saw fit" (**Judges 17.6**), sin within us causes each of us to want us to self-affirm. Kenosis is essential if we are to function as Christian community. We need to learn how to renounce self and live for Christ.

Not all religious communities are configured as Christian communities. The church is assigned to be Jesus Christ's bodily expression upon Earth. He has to be in charge. The church is not meant to be a free-for-all, ruled by consensual preference; nor is it meant to be an autocracy or plutocracy, ruled by a pastor or an elite group. It is meant to be ruled by Jesus Christ and him alone. How is this to be done?

As we look for God's leading, there is a need to recognise that not one of us, by ourselves, can reliably discern the mind of God in voluntary isolation from others. Reading the Bible and ignoring other people, quoting self-justificatory texts, is not the answer. Referencing the authoritative Scriptures does not mandate any one of us to be our own, final authority: any passage within the Bible can be twisted and interpreted by any of us to suit our own ends. Jesus

Christ is our final authority. The church is the body of Christ, of which he is the head. Divergence of opinion and perspective, within a group of people sharing and recalling Biblical testimony together, is healthy. Listening and learning through discussion will result in a convergence of differing perspectives and opinions: there may well be a level of conflict, even among people who respect and seek to honour one another. We can grow through healthy conflict. It is in the context of prayerfully reading and discussing Biblical texts that the Holy Spirit shapes discernment among us as to how God's Word is to be best applied to our lives as parts of the Body of Christ.

In this process of reading, interpreting and applying the Bible for the practice of living, tacit acceptance should not be mistaken as communal discernment. A strong leader with many words can unwittingly intimidate others into silence and mistake a lack of expressed disagreement as acceptance and confirmation that the mind of God has been voiced. Likewise, when a community is too thin to allow meaningful discussion of matters, a lack of engagement can be mistaken for approval. A measure of interpersonal conflict, arising from different perspectives and preferences, is both natural and healthy within any community. Responsible participation in communal discernment is important. Each of us needs to resist and renounce the powerful pull of individualistic self-determination. Each of us needs to embrace Jesus Christ's kenosis as part of our own lives.

Hearing God's Word, living under Christ's authority and resisting the temptation of listening only to ourselves

How can we better listen for God's voice, hearing and receiving His Word? Undoubtedly, use of Holy Scripture is central. But how might we best engage with the Bible together?

It is for the church, as a body of believers gathered together, to recognise and confirm what the Holy Spirit is saying, in a manner that is consonant with a plain reading of the God-breathed, authoritative, Holy Scriptures. There may be those among us who are well versed in the original languages of the Biblical texts, the history of the church or the varieties of different perspectives and doctrines that Christians have developed over the centuries in the reading of these texts; but such people have no claim to be set above others as infallible interpreters of divine revelation. Those recognised as having some expertise may helpfully serve as coaches, seeking to assist in guiding fellow disciples towards a better

reading, engagement with and understanding of the Holy Scriptures. It is, however, for the church gathered together to discern and agree on what God is saying.

This is a challenging path to walk upon. I have often heard the Bible expounded profoundly by one person, in a way that the Holy Spirit has clearly honoured and enabled. I have engaged with many sermons that have wonderfully opened men and women to a fresh meeting with the love, mercy and goodness of God, allowing them to better apprehend and understand His way and will for their lives. I have also witnessed preaching and heard teaching that has badly misrepresented and patently misunderstood the Holy Scriptures.

So how are we to discern, when we hear the Holy Scriptures opened to us, that it is being done in a way that allows the God-breathed revelation to speak to us? Part of the answer must be that, when a preacher or teacher speaks out, it is the duty of those listening to reflect on what they say, reflecting on whether the words spoken lead into a godliness that is consonant with a plain reading of the Bible as a whole. Does their reflection on the Biblical texts guide us on a path of discipleship in following our Lord Jesus Christ? We are obligated to ‘test the spirits’ of those who claim that their utterances are from God (**1 John 4.1**).

This places responsibilities on both the preacher and the congregation. The preacher should seek to humble themselves before God’s Word, applying the Holy Scriptures to themselves and looking to honour them through prayerful and careful preparation. For the congregation, there should be a prayerful bearing up of the preacher, asking God to speak through them in preaching. At the same time, there needs to be a recognition that while the Holy Scriptures are God-breathed, no human teacher or preacher, other than our Lord Jesus Christ, is infallible. The fact that an opinion or perspective has been preached with reference to the Holy Scripture does not make it of necessity the Word of God in the hearing of others. It should be listened to, reflected on and assessed, in the light of the narratives of Holy Scripture. Only then should it be recognised or rejected as God’s Word to us.

We also need to revisit and ponder the oft-held assumption that a preacher, even a scholarly one, can authoritatively expound and apply a single, solitary meaning to a text, even when that assumption is restricted to a specific occasion and location. In an earlier period, when a historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation was in ascendancy, this might have been arguably sustainable; but such a thesis dissolves when a plethora of contrasting and conflicting

theories about the original meaning and context of Biblical texts arise, as is often the case today. Even the use of many commentaries, regardless of whether or not we have some understanding of the philosophical suppositions or theological schema of their authors, does not validate a preacher's interpretation and application of a text as authoritative. Commentaries can certainly help us explore the nuances and better investigate the original context of a text; but we cannot pretend that a preacher or Biblical teacher can present a reading and grasp of the text that is untainted by the culture surrounding us in our context today. People may see what they are conditioned or predisposed to see in passages, depending on the culture or sub-culture that they own or inhabit. We may be trained to look for and prefer certain doctrines, values or practices. That is not the same as presenting a single meaning of a text that is true to the original context.

It is both to our advantage, in thinking things through clearly; and to our disadvantage, in concluding our train of logic is necessarily correct, that we live within a culture that stands in the tradition of the Enlightenment and the exaltation of the rational process over against the intuitive or affective senses. Most of us will likely start with a way of thinking that is based on a platonic model of knowing, meaning that we may look into a passage for key ideas or propositions. These will often be ideas that we have prior ownership of, through our preferred reading of systematic theologies, statements of faith or interpretative traditions.

I came across an example of this early in my ministry. The subject was a discussion around preaching on the Old Testament Book of Amos. My colleague had delivered a whole series of expository sermons without mentioning 'justice' once. What, you might ask, of Amos's famous call to 'justice'? It was not heard, because my colleague was not conditioned to recognise it. In one sense, his omission was understandable. He approached the book looking to expound a key doctrine that he expected to find there. The truth was that both of us were predisposed to look for a universal, once-for-all meaning, rather than engage with the text in dialogue – and embrace a developing, potentially uncomfortable relationship with this living and active, God-breathed Word of God speaking into our lives. We were so busy looking for what we expected to see, we could not properly hear the Word of God speaking anything else into our lives.

What if we all engaged with the Holy Scriptures as a dynamic and powerful, God-breathed gift to us? What might that look like, should every one of us within

church approach the narrative of the text, looking for God to speak out of the text into each of our lives today through our reading the text together?

I raise this question because I am increasingly persuaded as to the importance of the preacher bringing to members of a congregation the challenge of reading extended narratives in the Bible by themselves and among themselves, privately and in groups. Each event of reading Scripture should be an experience which is never completely replicable. God continues to speak through Holy Scripture by the Holy Spirit. The faithful preacher should share the effect they have experienced in their reading of the Holy Scriptures with a community of listeners; and go on to encourage further reflection and application, helping their hearers to engage in both personal and communal dialogue, with God and one another, through the Holy Scriptures. This process might begin with a preaching event; but it is more likely to be better rooted when there is further discussion and reflection on the text and its application to our lives, allowing both encouragement and challenge for each of us.

Put another way: what is the job of the preacher? My suggestion is that it is their responsibility to help listeners position themselves within the larger narrative of the Biblical text and to engage with what they are confronted. The preacher may want to point out certain challenges that they see, coming from their own engagement with the Scriptures; but the central task of the preacher should be to woo the listeners into immersing themselves in the narrative of Holy Scripture more deeply, in order to explore and discover a deeper allegiance to God in their lives, in a manner that is true to the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ.

Appropriate engagement with the Biblical text, for the person seriously seeking to progress as a disciple of Jesus Christ, will address this call to allegiance and intentional participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Discipleship may begin by responding to an invitation or revelation presented by a persuasive preacher. Thereafter, it needs to be rooted in a personal meeting with and knowing of the absolute truth that confronts us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus understood and taught that the Holy Scriptures are there to lead people to him. He rebuked those who failed to recognise that the Scriptures testify to him (**John 5.39**). He spoke of how they testify to him when expounding the Scriptures to disheartened disciples (**Luke 24.25-27**). Paul understood that the Scriptures, properly understood, lead us nowhere other than into a deeper participation in Jesus Christ (**2 Timothy 3.15-16** and **2 Corinthians 1.20**).

It is in this rooting of our own identity afresh in wanting to know nothing other than Jesus Christ and him crucified, as Paul declares to the Corinthian church (**1 Corinthians 2.2**), that we allow ourselves the possibility of discovering from the Holy Scriptures more of God and our vocation as Christians. It is crucially important, in seeking to encourage Christian discipleship, to challenge each other to engage with the Holy Scriptures together, that we might hear God speaking to and through the Bible. I would suggest three, simple questions that might prove helpful in engaging with passages outside the four Gospel accounts:

1. **What might Jesus make of this passage?**
(check with his words, works and ways as recorded in the Gospel accounts)
2. **How does this passage encourage, in calling us as disciples of Jesus Christ?**
3. **How does this passage challenge, in calling us as disciples of Jesus Christ?**

Recognising the God-breathed inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, whereby the Holy Spirit works through the sharing of insights birthed when read together as gathered church, is an important part of this process. It is better accomplished in a context of sharing, where there is a group of disciples present, searching the Scriptures, with no ultimate authority recognised other than Jesus Christ himself. This mitigates the likelihood of self-delusion by the individual or a group's cult-like following of a charismatic personality. Cultivating humility, with a readiness to listen to and weigh the insight of others, is a vital part of the process. The considerations of the godly preacher and teacher as a trained theologian will be helpful; but the shared understanding that comes from a plain reading of the text together, by those seeking to follow the way of Jesus, is what is truly valuable in helping to build faith, returning to ponder the Biblical text again and again, until we all reach maturity (**Hebrews 6.1**).

Dealing with performative church and the draw to consumerism

All that we have said is a challenge to church as a form of religious theatre, where congregants gather as consumers and, hopefully, leave as satisfied customers. Where church has sometimes been allowed to develop into such a parody of Christian community, it is hardly surprising that we see the abandonment of old, cold and drafty citadels of religion in pursuit of preferred and alternative forms of entertainment.

When church loses focus on the need to recall the words, works and ways of Jesus, it deserves to fail. It has ceased to be church. Any religious institution that offers a form of religion that does not declare the need to repent and to renounce consumerism and self-interest, has become irrelevant in the service of the Gospel. There is a need to prepare the way for God to refashion each one of us, to be operative parts of the church. We need together to recall, renounce; and then go on to grasp what it means to be refuelled by the Holy Spirit, as a community of Christian disciples. It is to the joyful challenge of refuelling, as community, that we now turn.

Chapter 13

Community and Refuelling

Breath. Wind. Water, spring and river of life. Tongues of fire. It is the intensified presence of the Holy Spirit that transforms hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, covering dry bones with life. It is the Holy Spirit that persuades, purifies and empowers, lifting us to perceive the union with God that we have been brought into through Jesus Christ.

Without the Holy Spirit, there can be no exuberant expression of Christian hope or joy among the community of Christ's disciples. There may be songs sung and sermons spoken; but they would sound empty and passionless. It is the Holy Spirit who animates and releases a fresh scent of anticipated fulfilment and fruitfulness when Christians gather. The Holy Spirit is the harbinger of hope and the igniter of faith.

Jesus, after his resurrection, explained to the disciples the importance of waiting in Jerusalem until this power of the Holy Spirit was released upon them (**Luke 24.49**). Jesus instructed the apostles, through the Holy Spirit (**Acts 1.2**), that they were to look to be baptised with the Holy Spirit (**Acts 1.5**). They were to be immersed, in an intensified infilling of God's presence, in a manner that had been prophesied by John the Baptist when, in seeing Jesus, the atoning mission of Jesus had been revealed to him (**John 1.29-34**).

As the prophet Ezekiel glimpsed (**Ezekiel 36 & 37**), it was through God's covenant faithfulness that the Kingdom of God upon Earth would be inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus is God's dwelling place among people made manifest to the World. With Jesus Christ now our ascended King, it is by the Holy Spirit that we are enabled to continue in the ministry of the Kingdom of God, through being clothed with and participating in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. When we grasp that our knowing of God proceeds *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to bring hope to the World.

This hope is ministered through Christ's community, the church. It is not a hope that is entrusted to any single person, for it is to be made known through a people, a plurality of persons, whose allegiance is to this One God. It is a renewed Israel, belonging to the Messiah and Light of the World, Jesus of Nazareth, that is to be the bearer of such a hope. It is a community of people,

gathered together with a common identity in Christ. It is through the Holy Spirit that the resurrected Christ teaches and deals with his community of disciples. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are filled with resurrection hope and are released to live in faith and love.

The starting point

Grasping the implications of hope, released into a community and going on to implement practices born of the Holy Spirit, is not necessarily easy. Frustration arising from our inability to control or contain the Holy Spirit can present a huge challenge to us, especially to those who are used to regulating functions within a community. People who truly love what Jesus has done for them can also be very wary of what, through the Holy Spirit, he might want to do among and with us now. It is the very nature of God, as He reveals Himself and deals with us in a manner uncontrollable and uncontainable by us, that can become the challenge that confounds us. Meeting with the wind and the fire of God can be truly frightening, threatening our accustomed normality. The dynamic of God's self-revelation means that we have to be ready to reorientate towards Him, again and again, as He moves and would enable us to be, in our humanity, better conformed to His image and likeness.

This is why our starting point, in seeking to be Christ's community, must be Jesus Christ himself. Our understanding of church needs to flow out of our recall of Jesus. In recalling the revelation that comes through Holy Scripture, renouncing self-identities that are independent of what pleases God, we must repeatedly return to Jesus in order to evaluate where and how God would lead us forward.

We meet with Christ at the point of his self-giving for us, at the Cross of Calvary. It is in this dying-to-self with him, as Jesus Christ died for us, that we come to a place where it is possible for us to be baptised with the Holy Spirit. We need that same embrace and empowering of the Holy Spirit by which Jesus Christ was raised up from death. As Jesus Christ was raised from death, so the Holy Spirit would lift us up in a life that is newly defined by the words, works and ways of the Son of God.

Coming to terms with a physical embrace of the Holy Spirit, dealing with us in the same embrace by which Jesus was raised from the dead, is critically important for our future. When Jesus Christ spoke of the disciples needing to be baptised with the Holy Spirit, he indicated that this would be an engagement

with the Holy Spirit different from what they had previously experienced. It was an experience that would arise out of the victory won at the Cross of Calvary, the power of Jesus' bodily resurrection and his ascension into the Heavens. From there Jesus would pour out the Holy Spirit into his body of disciples in a way that was unprecedented, powerfully affecting both the apostles and others.

There is a terrible danger in reducing our expectation of the Holy Spirit's manifestation among us to being simply that of a teacher or companion, or an invisible or even inert presence in the sacraments. Certainly, the Holy Spirit would teach us. Jesus talked of both a teaching (**John 14.26**) and accompanying ministry (**John 16.7-15**) that the Holy Spirit would minister to his disciples. The ministry of the Holy Spirit, however, is much more than that of a doctrinal teacher or silent companion. The Holy Spirit draws us through the death and into the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Where Jesus is the first-fruit of the New Creation, so it is that the creative, Holy Spirit would refashion us to be conformed more deeply to the holiness of Jesus.

We noted earlier that the drawing of our lives into a process of kenosis is only possible because of what Jesus undertook, on our behalf. Our engagement with personal and corporate kenosis can be made into a positive and life-enhancing process only because of the prior kenosis undertaken by Jesus Christ. This is the sovereign act of the One God, Ruler and Creator over all. This God has manifested Himself in and through the humanity of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, the One God graciously embraces our humanity. Likewise, the ministry of the Holy Spirit would come upon us and be active in every facet of our humanity. In dealing with us, the Holy Spirit would work in us both cognitively and affectively.

Cognitive and affective

We have a mind. We have feelings. A cognitive faculty, which each of us possesses, deals with rational process. We receive information and handle observations, ideas and values, forming convictions and practices. All of this is processed through our cognitive faculty. It is often described as 'left brain' activity. There is, however, more to our humanity than 'left brain' activity. There is also 'right brain' activity. The 'right brain' is often associated with artistic creativity, emotions and abstractions which are not easily defined. Institutionalised church traditions have sometimes found it hard to deal with the affective aspect of our humanity, partly because it is easier to prescribe and regulate cognitive conformity. We can identify that there are ideas, values and

practices that are right and there are those that are wrong. Feelings and emotions are less easy to control and regulate. This does not make them wrong, unhelpful or irrelevant. Just difficult.

Difficulty can arise when the Holy Spirit animates and inspires our life in ways that are creatively, artistically or emotionally expressive; but are not reducible to rational propositions, readily defined by cognitive processes. There can be problems in recognising and embracing the Holy Spirit, the creative Wind who sustains the Cosmos, when He comes to us with an intensified presence, acting upon and inhabiting every aspect of our humanity. The Holy Spirit threatens our man-made parameters, preferences and prejudices today, as much as He threatened the Pharisees and Scribes who confronted Jesus. The Holy Spirit looks to make space for fresh, creative expression of the Kingdom of God in us and through church as a community of disciples. The Holy Spirit requires space to express and expand His presence within Christian community, for He is not readily contained or controlled. Where church is to function as an anastatic community we need to recall Jesus, acknowledging every aspect of our humanity as belonging to and accessible to God. We need to renounce stagnant religiosity, recognising that our humanity is possessed of both cognitive and affective faculties, both of which should be expressed to the glory of God.

We will return, in Part 3, to reflect on how this affects our understanding and approach to engaging with gifts and ministries within the body of Christ. For now, we note that caution needs to be taken in not quenching the powerful creativity of the Holy Spirit, as He seeks to move in and through the church, as the body of Christ. A body that, like any other, can experience both ecstasy and pain. It is to the pain of suffering that we turn to next.

Chapter 14

Experiencing Suffering

Suffering is an experience that visits upon us all. For some, it is an occasional eruption of pain, rarely recurring. For others, suffering can punctuate all seasons of life. Whether physical, emotional or mental, it is seldom welcome. It can both result from and produce hurt, anxiety or sorrow. Suffering is likely to be transformative, because it challenges and is likely to change us. It can both diminish and develop us. Suffering may lead to an erosion of faith; but it can also refine and enhance our participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

In reflecting upon the effect suffering has in experiencing faith we begin by recalling the narrative of Israel and Jesus Christ's journey, in both Old and New Testaments, recalling the hope of what God has promised. From there, we will go on to observe how the quest after a deeper experience of faith requires us to embrace suffering, where renouncing is demanded in looking to share more deeply in Jesus Christ's kenosis. Then we will proceed to look at how God, reshaping and refashioning us, would refuel us in experiencing faith, dealing with us in anastatic empowerment.

Old Testament

Suffering is prominent throughout the story of Israel, from its inception to covenantal fulfilment in Christ. The very name, Israel, reminds us of Jacob's injury and subsequent limp, arising from wrestling with God at Peniel. Indeed, from the opening verses of the Book of Genesis, we see suffering present as God is at work to shape and form what is good out of the primeval, chaotic formlessness of Earth. The early accounts of human development, from the lies and deception of Eve and Adam and the terrible murder of Abel by his brother Cain, illustrate the struggle that would ensue as God works to carve out from humanity a people who would not be alienated from Him. Amidst the raw rebellion that is evidenced in human behaviour, God looks to reform and shape a nation who might better bear His image and likeness. A people fitted, despite a chaos compounded by mankind's rebellion, to be His co-workers upon Earth.

It is within this disordered Creation that God works, by the Holy Spirit, to deliver people from the root causes of their suffering. Suffering arises within a Creation tainted by humanity's failure to conform to the will of God, a Creation spoilt by sin. It is a narrative of deliverance from this disordered suffering that punctuates the account of God's covenantal dealing with people, throughout the stories of the Old Testament.

The Creation and a humanity that God created and fashioned to be good were, from the outset, on a developmental trajectory. God's full purpose and plan for Creation would only be realised when humanity becomes fully harmonised with the purposes of God. Where God forges covenants with Noah (**Genesis 9.8-11**) and Abraham (**Genesis 17 & 22**), it is within the context of crises that face them, requiring both resolution and consecration, to carry them on a journey through suffering towards the realisation and fulfilment of hope. It is in the midst of suffering that the people of Israel begin to call out to God from their Egyptian captivity (**Exodus 2.24**). It is from a place of perplexity that Moses, in conflict both with Pharaoh and the Israelites, is affirmed by God repeating the covenant promise made to Abraham (**Exodus 6.1-9**). It is in the midst of a journey that involves pain and suffering that God makes a further covenant with the people of Israel, at Mount Sinai (**Exodus 19.5-6**), proclaiming to them their destiny. All of this is forged in the midst of suffering, while drawing the people of Israel along a path that is intended to refine and ready them for the realisation of God's covenanted purposes released into their lives.

What we witness throughout the Old Testament is a path of redemption that God takes His people along; and it is a path that always involves suffering. There is, in the Biblical testimony, no redemptive transformation without suffering being endured. It does not always have to be punitive suffering, arising because of folly and as punishment. Suffering is present in the very fabric of Creation, as it is carried forward towards its healing and fulfilment in the full coming of the Kingdom of God. This process of maturation and worthwhile development will always entail a measure of suffering. When we turn to the Old Testament, we are confronted with the importance of recalling this.

New Testament

The New Testament does not depart from this trajectory of development, which entails necessary suffering. Nowhere do we see this more clearly than in the life of Jesus Christ himself. The Gospels witness to us how Jesus foreknew and

embraced the inevitability of his own suffering. Jesus sought to explain to his disciples, following Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, "that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (**Matthew 16.21**). The process that would lead to a greater release of the presence and power of the Kingdom of God, in and through us, would inevitably carry Jesus through suffering.

A fuller understanding as to the importance of suffering, in the life of Jesus, is laid out in the Book of Hebrews. Emphasising the humanity that Jesus shares with us, the writer states, "it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered" (**Hebrews 2.10**). Jesus suffered, in being tempted to turn away from his calling as Messiah (**Hebrews 2.18**). The writer to the Hebrews understands that the suffering of Jesus, as with Israel in the Old Testament, is an integral part of his learning to live a consecrated life and outwork a ministry of obedience to his Heavenly Father. Suffering was integral to this process of maturing as a man. "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (**Hebrews 5.8-9**). The suffering that Jesus endured may have come to a climax at Golgotha (**Hebrews 13.12**); yet the writer to the Hebrews understands that suffering was present throughout the process of Jesus' maturation and development, that Jesus might fulfil his ministry.

This valuable insight into the experience of Jesus helps us better understand the Apostle Paul's perception as to the place of suffering within his own life and, by inference, within the Christian disciple's life. In coming to terms with his own experience, as he served the cause of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, Paul stated, "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church" (**Colossians 1.24**). There is a process that is continuing, in the life of the church, as the church embodies and expresses the continuing, physical ministry of Jesus in the world. The church is the community of people wherein the One God continues to inhabit a place and space on this Earth.

As Paul notes in writing to the Roman church, it is through a process of suffering that perseverance, character and hope are honed within us (**Romans 5.3**). The present experience of suffering in our lives is integrally part of a process where, as co-heirs of God with Christ, "we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (**Romans 8.17**).

Indeed, with our eyes on the hope of what is to be realised in the full coming of the Kingdom of God to Earth, we should along with Paul, “consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us”.

There was a reward for Jesus, in enduring and working through the suffering that arose out of his obedience to his Heavenly Father. It is the reward celebrated in the Philippian hymn, in that having embraced the self-emptying and obedience required of him as a man, “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name” (**Philippians 2.10**). Jesus enacted and fulfilled the purpose God had, from the beginning of time, for mankind. Jesus, found fully to be a human being, recalled his commission, emptied himself for a path of obedience to God and, though it took him to death on a Cross, fulfilled his mission. In being bodily resurrected, as a man for all mankind, Jesus received his reward.

This is a reward that we will share in because of what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us. As Paul emphasises in writing to the Christians in Corinth, “one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (**2 Corinthians 5.14-15**). This is what we are to recall. So it is we are envisioned to affirm with Paul that, “I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead” (**Philippians 3.10-11**). The process of recalling Christ’s suffering leads us into a focus, in experiencing faith, on kenosis in our own lives. To this we now turn.

Chapter 15

Suffering and Renouncing

Suffering is both an expansive word and experience. It can either crush or cultivate faith. Suffering births both negative and positive experience within our lives. We are drawn through it into depths that we might never otherwise have known or explored. It is the quest for growing maturity, for a faith that is understood in terms of intentional participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, that makes suffering not only inevitable but necessary for the disciple of Jesus Christ. As Christ had to learn obedience through what he suffered, can we imagine it would be otherwise for us? As Christ was matured and became complete through what he suffered, is it not inevitable that we should have to deal with suffering in order to mature?

The Experience

The effects of a physical attack or personal violation are never welcome. Suffering arising out of emotional rejection or mental abuse can lead to pathologies that last a lifetime. Grief and bereavement will often be debilitating. Suffering occasions a sense of abandonment within us. It alerts us to the absence of a needed presence or person to protect, shield and heal us or another from pain and harm, whether the suffering is experienced physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually.

The revelation that comes in and through Jesus Christ is that God neither rejects nor avoids the suffering that is now woven into His Creation. Through Jesus Christ, God embraces suffering. He enters into the experiences of human life in Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, through the Son of God becoming completely and unreservedly human. God participates in mankind's suffering, assuming our humanity in order to heal it. He does this in order to rescue and mature us, taking us forward and shaping us to be co-heirs with Jesus Christ.

Involvement means participation, both for God and for us. Faith, as it arises within us, leads us into participation in the faith of Jesus Christ, for this is what our Father in Heaven draws us into by the Holy Spirit. We come to enter into our destiny, the reason for our salvation, through learning to participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, thereby becoming participators in the divine

nature (**2 Peter 1.4**). Integral to this is the process of learning to embrace suffering within our own humanity, as God Himself has embraced suffering in and through the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Where this calling is to participate in Christ's humanity, as he has participated in ours, what might that mean in terms of our focus on kenosis, our renouncing?

First, there is the need to embrace kenosis in our own lifestyle. This was made clear by Jesus, when he proclaimed, in the Beatitudes (**Matthew 5.1-12**), the power of participating in poverty, mourning, meekness and hunger for God's Kingdom, as well as the merits of being merciful, pure and peacemakers. Pursuing this way of living, sharing in the types of suffering that Jesus experienced, will attract insults, false accusations and persecution. This type of living, however, is what God looks for in those who would follow Jesus. It is the pursuit of a counter-cultural agenda that kenosis commands of us, renouncing false values generated by secular society's denial of and revolt from God. The value system of the disciple can never be comfortably at peace with value systems that do not embrace the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, there is a call upon our lives to embrace kenosis through the way that we invest in the lives of others. The Nazareth Manifesto, which Jesus declared in the synagogue of his home-town, was explicit:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (**Luke 4:18-19**).

Our investment of ourselves in others, in following the path of Jesus Christ, is to favour the marginalised and the disadvantaged. Kenosis demands that we look out for the poor, the prisoner, the blind and the oppressed. It is to view the impoverished not with contempt or disgust but with a sense of responsibility that seeks to identify with and minister to them. We have to be prepared to suffer, in order to minister to them. To invest ourselves in them.

The Effects

In Part 3 of this book, we will go on to explore how our focus points might shape our mission and ministry to others. In this chapter, we continue by going on to note how suffering might shape our experience of faith.

There can be redemptive power in suffering. Discipline from God, which brings about suffering, came upon the Israelites as they progressed forward on their journey out of bondage. This aspect of God allowing or occasioning tragedy, in order to gather His people to His path for them, is a theme found throughout the Books of the Old Testament. And in the New Testament the redemptive mission of Jesus, focally expressed in **Isaiah 53**, follows the Old Testament in giving expression to how God uses suffering in order to redeem and deliver the people of Israel.

Suffering can also arise, not only from redemption facilitated by retribution, but also in acting as a poultice for the pain and suffering of others. This is crucially enacted by our Lord in his death. It is also to be seen in his earlier ministry of healing and deliverance. As the Apostle Matthew observed, “When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all who were ill. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.’” (**Matthew 8.16-17**).

Suffering can transform what would otherwise be but sympathy into a deeper sense of empathy. When we ourselves undergo hardship or pain, in a way that relates to and resonates with the suffering of others, it can bring us a greater appreciation of what others endure. When people see us prevail in faith, through the midst of personal suffering, it demonstrates an authenticity in faith that could otherwise have been obscured.

More primitively, suffering draws us into deeper conformity to Jesus Christ. Suffering can often be the lot of a servant. Jesus ministered as a suffering servant, not because he desired to suffer, but because the pursuit of his own ministry demanded that he do so. It is the pursuit of such a path that characterises the life of those given over to worshipping and giving glory to God. The Apostle Paul noted that, “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him” (**1**

Corinthians 1.27-29). Paul continues, in his second letter to the church in Corinth, “he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (**2 Corinthians 12.8-9**).

Suffering, when it draws us to a place where our own strength fails to sustain and fulfil us, can bring to us a fresh sense of the heavenly dimension, that eludes the sight of the proud; but can be revealed to those whose life has been characterised by renunciation, by kenosis. It is this that prepares and enables us to forge on, longing to be refuelled by God in the mist of suffering, through the Holy Spirit bringing anastatic empowerment into our lives.

Chapter 16

Suffering and Refuelling

Resurrection and deliverance. The antithesis of death and bondage. The destiny that God calls us into is that we should know and experience the refuelling that comes in Jesus' name, flowing out of relationship with our ascended Lord. Anastatic empowerment. Certainly, the path to refuelling takes us through renouncing. The practice of renouncing entails suffering. It is unavoidable. It was certainly the case for Jesus. It is also the case for those called to participate in his life, ministry and victory.

The life we are called to participate in is not, however, that of a dead Jesus. Nor of an ever-suffering Jesus. Suffering can be an oft repeated stage on the journey that we pass through, not the end we aim for. The life God has for us now flows out of our communion with our ascended Lord, who lives and reigns in the Heavens. That this is a Jesus who is alive and able to commune and meet with us, by the Holy Spirit, is something we need to constantly recall. It is through focusing on the life, ministry and victory of our Lord that we can better understand what our destiny is. This inspires us with hope and strengthens us in faith, enabling us to journey along the path that carries us through suffering.

Anastasis begins for us now. Yes, we look to know, in our future, the experience of bodily resurrection. God will, one day, reconstitute and reconfigure us with bodies that conform to the body of our ascended Lord. The power that will bring about this resurrection reality is the same power that comes upon and into us now, by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would anoint and inhabit us for a life that is enabled and rooted in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus; triumphing with him over death, disease, the devil and despair. This comes to us through experiencing faith that is refuelled in anastatic empowerment.

Hope

Anastatic empowerment is not automatically realised in the Christian life. It has to be looked for and longed for. Just as our focus points of recalling and renouncing require voluntary engagement by us in anamnesis and kenosis, so anastatic empowerment has to be desired by us.

The great lie that too many subscribe to is a belief that our present experience of faith, by the Holy Spirit, is as good as it gets. That there is nothing more to be looked for or expected from God in this present existence is so wrong. This delusion often arises because of disappointment, disillusionment, or a sense of failure in not having enough faith in order to move forward with the One God. These are tragic outcomes. We are all on a journey and none of us have yet arrived at the end of it.

Anastatic empowerment does not begin with faith. It begins with hope: a hope that is birthed through hearing of God's faithfulness, His love and His covenants. Faith is born out of recalling how all of this is gifted to us in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Good News that ignites hope, even in the depths of suffering, can be a candle lit in the darkness. It is then that faith can be birthed within us by the Holy Spirit. Faith that will carry us along a road that can be very bumpy at times, leading us through kenosis and into anastasis.

It is this hope that God offers us, warming the cold night of despair, that beckons and leads us onwards along the path that we are to walk upon. It begins with a ray of hope, leading to desire: a desire to participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Anastatic empowerment enables hope to be discovered and renewed even amidst suffering. In the midst of kenotic suffering, there has to be a holding to hope. Where there is little or no expectation of God moving in our lives, to take us into deeper conformity to Jesus Christ, then faith becomes impossible.

Anastatic empowerment does not bring us escape from the challenges and tragedies of life. It is the way we are enabled, by the Holy Spirit, to meet with God in the midst of them; and know that we have not yet reached the end of the journey.

The cry of faith

Forging a path of faith, in the midst of suffering, is not easy. It was not easy for Jesus, nor will it be easy for us. Yet it is a path we are called to progress along. That we hold onto the priority of hope, with faith and love flowing out into our lives, is vitally important in this process. Hope teaches us that the fullness that is to come will be fully realised in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the complete liberation and renewal of the Heavens and the Earth. Faith, born out of hope, can then be released. Faith is a response to this awakening by God.

The anastatic workings of the Holy Spirit release within us a measure of the Kingdom of God, to be expressed into our lives; and this is a measure for our Father in Heaven to decide upon, not us. Such faith fosters faithfulness on our part, in becoming attentive, listening to the sonorous voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to us and within us, drawing us deeper into the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ and impressing the mind of Christ upon us.

This cry of faith sometimes has to yield, for a season, to a voice that allows lament and pain to be expressed. In the mist of suffering, the cry of faith is not a triumphalist one that denies the reality of pain. The cry of faith will often be birthed amidst the darkness of despair, even as Jesus entered into death and descended to Hades before his resurrection. Lament is a necessary part of grief; yet, where there is a reason to hope that arises out of Jesus Christ's resurrection, the cry of lament can be turned into a ray of hope that issues in faith. As the writer of the Book of Lamentations puts it, "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him'" (**Lamentations 3.21-24**).

A renewed utterance of the cry, 'Abba, Father!', may be helpful in rediscovering what it is to cry out to God in hope. It was the cry of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (**Mark 14.36**). It is the cry that comes out of us, according to Paul, when the Holy Spirit affirms us as co-heirs with Christ (**Romans 8.15, Galatians 4.6**). The cry of faith is born of hope, by the Holy Spirit's presence within us amidst suffering, in anastatic empowerment.

Anastatic empowerment

We need repeatedly to rediscover the importance of experiencing faith in a way that is suffused with anastatic empowerment. Anastatic empowerment in the present would not release a faith within us that fulfils our fleshly fantasies. The Holy Spirit is not the means whereby we are empowered to achieve our own dreams or desires. Anastatic empowerment harnesses us to the path of Jesus Christ. It is when we give ourselves to this path that the Holy Spirit refuels us: embracing, entering and engaging us with anastatic - resurrection - empowerment.

The suffering that this process repeatedly brings to us is tangible. It would be easier, in some ways, to hold to an understanding of faith that is simply the ownership of ideas, of doctrines, of rituals and traditions. A faith that is defined by participation in the life, ministry of Jesus Christ does not, however, allow for such detachment from the workings of the Holy Spirit. Authentic faith demands that we forge forward upon the path of Jesus Christ, something that can only happen when the Holy Spirit enables and empowers us.

Waiting for the fullness

Authentic faith involves the pain of waiting. Hoping and thirsting. Crying out in prayer and not stopping, until the Holy Spirit visits us with enabling power. This was the approach of the first disciples, after the ascension of Jesus Christ. Over a period of ten days, they met together in prayer with the other followers of Jesus. They waited, longing to receive power from on high (**Acts 1.14**). They prayed until the fire fell upon them, on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2.1-2**). Then the church was released into effective ministry in Jesus' name. Waiting and tarrying in prayer humbles us. It exposes our impotency and inadequacy to achieve anything of worth by ourselves. It leads us into deeper longing for more anastatic empowerment.

This also involves coming to terms with the limited deliverance from suffering that we experience in this life. We wait and long for a fullness that is to come. As we wait, we realise that a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us is essential. The Holy Spirit irrigates us with a foretaste, a guarantee, of the fullness that is to come (**2 Corinthians 1.22; 5.5; Ephesians 1.14**). At the same time, what we taste is not the full measure of what awaits us. So it is that people will experience healing and deliverance from situations of bondage. Then later, disease may visit and death will come. There is only disappointment leading to disillusionment when we fail to embrace the reality of waiting for the fullness. Suffering will continue, here on Earth, until the end comes. In the meantime, we need the power of anastasis to be at work in us. We need it in our own lives, as an encouragement towards faithfulness. We need it to sharpen and enable effectiveness. We need it to bring a taste of God's healing and deliverance to those without hope, who need to experience faith, infilled and released into experiencing the reality of divine love.

Conclusion to Part Two

Meeting the One God and willingly being embraced by His Triune Being leads us into experiencing a faith that calls us into community and also draws us through suffering. Such a process equips and enables us for fuller engagement in the mission that God calls us to, through life with Jesus Christ. It is to the nature of that mission that we now turn.

Part Three

Mission of God and Mission of Mankind

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brought a critical change to the destiny of humanity. Jesus did not come into the World simply to die. His substitutionary death was necessary for us to be released from the powerful grip-hold of death, the Devil, disease and despair; but death itself was not Jesus' goal. His ministry was to bear the presence of the Kingdom of God to the Earth. Bodily resurrection was his goal. Jesus declared, "I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal" (**Luke 13.32**). Raised from the dead on the third day, his exaltation was vindication in enacting a human life that fulfilled mankind's destiny and, as Messiah, fulfilled Israel's mission by renouncing and serving, humbling himself and obeying (**Philippians 2.5-11**). He lived our life for us, expressing the presence of mankind in full, unspoilt communion with God. He died our death for us. He was raised anew for us, that we might now be refuelled in anastatic power by the Holy Spirit. The Mission of God and the Mission of Mankind were conjoined, through death and resurrection, in the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. They are, according to the Apostle Paul, all signs of the Kingdom of God (**Romans 14.17**). These signs are all to be experienced, practiced and pursued as integral to a life of faith. This is because the One God arrests us in His saving act of reaching out and embracing us *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit.

In examining the effect of holding together our three focus points of Recall, Renounce and Refuel, we now go on to look at the way the One God has established the church as His conduit in pouring love, life and light into the lives of people across the World. We look at ways in which, by the Holy Spirit at work in us, God brings to expression a kaleidoscope of characteristics, virtues and practices that manifest the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ among His people and in the World.

We begin by looking at the Gift of God and what that generates among us. This Gift is purposefully present in the church, enabling the church to manifest the powerful intensity of the One God dwelling in our midst, in Jesus' name. We

then go on to look at the process of discipleship development that this presence would release in us; and how that might be better enacted and enhanced in the days to come. From there we go on to reflect on how this could invite us to rethink how the church might more effectively engage in mission, within our context and into the world.

Chapter 17

Experiencing the Gift

There is One Gift to be received from the One God, more precious than any other presence that we can receive into our lives, as we come to recognise who Jesus Christ is. The Holy Spirit comes to us, poured into the body of Christ upon Earth. The Holy Spirit is the One Gift we are to seek after.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

The Gift that God gives to His people, in the name of Jesus, is the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2.38; 10.45; 11.17**). The Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, the presence of the One God in us. The very naming of God the Holy Spirit as a Gift conveys the immense difference that the One God would have the Holy Spirit make in our lives, as He wants to fill us with His presence.

In one sense, the Holy Spirit is with everyone. The Holy Spirit, who is the Creator Spirit, is active and present everywhere, imparting and sustaining life to the whole Cosmos. The Holy Spirit comes to Jesus' disciples, however, in an additional way, a specially intense way. His presence, working in us and through us, is one of anastatic empowerment. The Holy Spirit comes to us in this way, bearing the presence of the Kingdom of God, in Jesus' name. Anastatic empowerment always led Jesus Christ into glorifying and obeying his Heavenly Father. Such empowerment can now operate in us because of who Jesus is and what he has done. Jesus calls us into glorifying and obeying his Heavenly Father. This is something we constantly need to recall in order to experience a life that participates in the ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

Jesus embraced a kenotic lifestyle in order to fulfil his mission. This lifestyle came to its ultimate resolution at the Cross of Calvary. There Jesus utterly emptied himself, surrendering into the very experience of death, for our sake. His goal and his reward was in the glorious outworking of anastatic power expressed into his physical body, raising him from death to a place of exaltation, ruling over all from the Heavens. A resurrected, ascended Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, is now sovereign over all Creation. Renouncing was a key to this outcome. To experience anastatic empowerment, there is something to renounce.

Poured out from the Heavens by our exalted Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to inhabit and animate the lives of those who respond to the Gospel in faith: the lives of those who embrace the revelation that the life-infusing Kingdom of God has come to Earth in and through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was there in Jesus, ministering the presence of the Kingdom of God upon Earth, throughout all his ministry whilst on Earth. The Holy Spirit now seeks to inhabit disciples of Jesus Christ with a special intensity. The Holy Spirit is here to minister, in and through those who have faith in Jesus. We need to be refuelled.

This empowerment, to minister the presence of the Kingdom of God in and through our humanity, was released among Jesus' disciples once Jesus had provided atonement for our sins. The Holy Spirit now looks to empower Jesus' disciples with the same power He exercised in raising Jesus Christ from the dead (**Ephesians 1.19-20**). It is this anastatic empowerment that enables us to participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. The way that the Holy Spirit worked in Jesus, in bringing to expression the presence of the Kingdom of God on Earth, is the way that the Holy Spirit would work in us now.

Gift and giftings

We should note, at this point, a useful distinction to be made between the Gift of the Holy Spirit and the giftings He manifests through us. This distinction will be important for us when we come to look at what it is that God would do in and through us, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

The need to differentiate between Gift and giftings is easily lost sight of in our translations of the Greek text of the New Testament. Various New Testament passages speak of the Holy Spirit as the Gift that God gives to us. A New Testament Greek word for the Holy Spirit, as this gift, is *dorea*. It is the word used by Luke to describe the Holy Spirit in the three passages from the Acts of the Apostles, cited above. It is also the word used with regard to the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John, when Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well (**John 4.10**); and in the Book of Hebrews, where the writer refers to the Holy Spirit as, "the heavenly gift" (**Hebrews 6.4**). The Apostle Paul uses this word when speaking of the gift of God's grace to us in Christ (**Romans 5.15; 2 Corinthians 9.15; Ephesians 3.7, 4.7**), as the righteousness we are receiving (**Romans 5.17**). The Holy Spirit is given to us, to enable us live a life of faith, the Gift of God's grace in our lives.

The words that Paul uses to describe the manifestations of the Holy Spirit are different. There are two words. The first is *charismata*, which means 'manifestations of grace'. It comes from the Greek word for 'grace', *charis*. This word is used in Paul's Letter to the Romans, when speaking of 'gift' (**Romans 11.29; 12.6**); and frequently in **1 Corinthians 12** and **14**. The other word translated as 'gift' is *pneumatika*, or 'manifestations of Spirit' (**1 Corinthians 14.1**). It comes from *pneuma*, the Greek word for 'spirit'.

When reading in the Bible about the 'gifts' that God gives to us, especially in **1 Corinthians 12** and **Romans 12**, we are reading about manifestations of the Spirit, not the Gift of the Holy Spirit Himself. For empowering people in the Christian life, our gracious God gives one Gift to us: the special presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, to work anastatic empowerment in us. It is important that we distinguish the Holy Spirit, as the Gift, from the various ways the Holy Spirit may choose to manifest Himself in and through us. These ways are diverse and varied. *Charismata* and *pneumatika* are probably better rendered as 'giftings'. We will use this word when referring to them, as distinct from the Gift of the Holy Spirit Himself.

There is good reason for emphasising this distinction between Gift and giftings. Manifestations are not the same as the impartation of the Gift of God Himself, the Holy Spirit, into our lives. In much popular speech and writing about the Holy Spirit and the 'gifts' we receive from God, a confusion often occurs between the nature of the Holy Spirit, as the Gift of God's presence in our life, and giftings as manifestations of grace and spiritual activity. This can cause Christians to unwittingly avoid looking for a deeper impact of the anastatic activity of the Holy Spirit upon our personal lives.

On the one hand, we can mistake the presence of what seems to be a 'gift' as assurance that we possess all that the Holy Spirit would give to or manifest through us. That would be misleading. Even wrong. There is always more that the Holy Spirit would work in our lives.

On the other hand, there is the danger of fearfulness. Giftings, where badly managed, misused or fabricated by us, can cause fright, confusion and bring disrepute to church. We can become very cautious. Moreover, when leadership and members of churches are untutored in an appropriate use of giftings and inexperienced in managing the dynamics that arise, fear and fright can lead to rejection or a reluctance to engage with the giftings; and unwittingly, churches

can end up quenching the presence and power of the Holy Spirit's anastatic empowerment in their midst. The Holy Spirit is made unwelcome. And the church becomes impotent.

The Jesus Gift

The Gift that comes in Jesus' name is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Holiness is the Jesus Gift. The Creator Spirit of the whole Cosmos, coming to indwell and fill us in a specially intensified way. Just as He came to fill Jesus' humanity. What does He do in us? He would do the same things in and through us as He did in Jesus, while Jesus was on Earth. He comes to us, to raise us up in communion with our glorified Lord Jesus and enable us to participate in Jesus' life, ministry and victory while we continue to live here, on Earth. The Holy Spirit's primary anastatic work in us is to capitalise on what Jesus has done for us, continuing to advance the Kingdom of God through us, the dwelling place of God upon Earth. He would place the seal and mark of Jesus Christ upon our lives: "you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (**Ephesians 1.13**). Through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we can recall and reveal through our practices the power of the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ.

Growing in our understanding of the immensity of who the Holy Spirit is and what He would accomplish among us is extremely important. A diminished understanding of the Holy Spirit will lead to our having a diminished understanding of ourselves, as Christian disciples, together with an impoverished understanding of Christian ministry, losing sight of the great things that God would accomplish in and through us. Likewise, if we fail to see that the Holy Spirit's focus is in crafting us to be more like Jesus, we will possibly become inept in discerning the ways in which the Holy Spirit is present and at work among us. The Holy Spirit, like a potter, works with the clay of our humanity to shape us into the likeness of Jesus. Jesus alone is the template and model, in the Holy Spirit's moulding and shaping of us.

Experiencing the Gift and Fruitfulness

What are we to expect of the Holy Spirit's presence in our life, where He would work in us with anastatic power? When we understand that the Holy Spirit's ministry is to shape us and form us for participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, we will appreciate better the importance of being formed

well in order to function effectively. Character matters. Values matter. Holiness matters. To be fitted as instruments of the Holy Spirit, for the exercise of His giftings expressed through our lives, we need to be dealt with by God, in order to cultivate a fruitfulness that reflects the character displayed in the life of Jesus Christ himself.

In speaking of the Holy Spirit's dynamic presence and power, it can therefore be a mistake to begin with a discussion of giftings. We will come to those in the next chapter. First, it is better to begin with a quest for fruitfulness in character. This is what Jesus did. When we recall his teachings in the Gospels, we see Jesus repeatedly emphasising his values, the values of the Kingdom of God. Jesus sought to cultivate these within his disciples. Jesus recalled, again and again, the importance of justice and righteousness, love and mercy; and care for the poor and the marginalised, the outcast and the stranger. He stressed the fruitfulness of the Kingdom of God expressed in and through the values and practices of human life.

The Apostle Paul likewise recalls and emphasises the nature of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, that we are to cultivate and manifest in our lives as disciples. In this, we find all three of our focus points - of recalling, renouncing and refuelling – given expression. Paul speaks of the fruit to be evidenced in disciples' lives, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (**Galatians 5.22-25**). This fruitfulness of character, born of the Holy Spirit's presence and effect upon us, is to be a concern of ours. We are to recall the fruitfulness of Jesus' life. We are to renounce habits learnt from godless living. We are to look to be refuelled by the Holy Spirit so that we might be formed in and express virtues that are true to the character of Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

This emphasis on fruitfulness of character is something we should not lose sight of, when speaking of experiencing faith. The Holy Spirit looks to develop virtues in our lives that cause us to conform to the character of Jesus Christ. The development of this character is of critical importance, in that it lends legitimacy to our claim that we have come into a life shared with the One God. The Apostle Peter, having written on how we come to participate in the divine nature, goes on to exhort, "make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to

mutual affection, love” (**2 Peter 1.5-7**). It is the development of these qualities that, “will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (**2 Peter 1.8**).

In experiencing faith, we need to give attention to the fruitfulness that the Holy Spirit would produce in our lives. His intensified presence will bring a conviction of sin, leading us into repenting and renouncing aspects of life that inhibit our developing a deeper faith, a deeper participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit would refuel us for righteous living and for asserting and expressing the victory that comes through the ministry of Jesus Christ, in breaking and releasing us from areas of bondage and oppression that we presently experience in our lives. This development of our personal character is integral to our experiencing faith.

Growing in the Gift

Over the last five hundred years, we have seen a steady transformation take place in the church worldwide. The European Reformation brought a rediscovery of the Bible as the authoritative source of God-breathed revelation, with regard to the One God and His plans for humanity. This, together with spiritual rebirth through redemption and sanctification, made possible for people through faith in Jesus Christ. The development of these emphases, on the Bible and personal faith in Jesus Christ, opened the way for a rediscovery of the way the Holy Spirit would grant to us an animated, vivid and real relationship with our Lord Jesus. Throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries, the growth of Holiness Movements in Europe and North America emphasised the importance of coming to receive an intensified visitation of the Holy Spirit in our lives: a transformative work of the Holy Spirit, that would change the character of men and women to experience and manifest holiness.

Teaching on all of these – the authoritative content of the Bible, the centrality of faith in Jesus Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit with fresh intensity to shape holiness in our lives – paved the way for the Pentecostal Revival that exploded into the world at the beginning of the twentieth century, bringing an emphasis upon the Holy Spirit’s giftings. That revival also heralded a fresh discovery of how men and women can be empowered, in experiencing faith, to not only acknowledge the words and ways of Jesus Christ, but to do his works. It is to this aspect of experiencing faith, in doing the works of Jesus and employing the giftings of the Holy Spirit, that we now turn.

Chapter 18

The Ministry of the Gift

We have rehearsed aspects of what Jesus encouraged his disciples to recall, as well as what he called them to renounce. We have also looked at how the One God would refuel us, through the Holy Spirit's infilling presence in our lives, forming and shaping our character to conform more closely to the character of Jesus Christ. In this chapter we go on to look at the Holy Spirit's giftings, as they are manifested in our humanity. We look at how and why the giftings operate as they do. But first, we look to the life and ministry of Jesus. In Jesus we see the pattern of a man fully consecrated to God, a life offered up in self-emptying service and humble obedience to his Heavenly Father. What did the Holy Spirit accomplish in the life of Jesus Christ? What were the works that Jesus did; and to what measure do these works offer an example or template for what we are to do?

The first thing to note is that Jesus did not seek to rule over or to dominate others, during his own ministry on Earth. The Gift neither sanctions nor enables domination over others. Jesus fulfilled his calling by emptying himself, taking the form of a servant, humbling himself and being obedient to his Heavenly Father. He then invited others to follow him, embracing them as co-workers in his ministry. This ministry began after his baptism in water and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him. The Holy Spirit enabled Jesus as he proclaimed the arrival of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Important though this proclamation of the Kingdom of God was, we need to recall that Jesus did more than preach. He also healed sick people and expelled demonic influences from their lives. Through the anastatic empowering of the Holy Spirit, he even brought dead people back to life. Jesus treated both the manifestations of anastatic power and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God as integral components of his message: 'God's delivering presence is here, come among us. Repent!' When John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus, enquiring as to whether Jesus was the expected Messiah of Israel, Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (**Matthew 11.4-5**). The words of Jesus and the works of Jesus are woven together to be the tapestry of his ministry. Together, they constitute the message of the Messiah, that the One God has

turned up in a place and occupies a space on Earth, to both announce and demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is here, now! Tangible demonstrations of God's healing and liberating power are inextricable accompaniments to the message proclaimed, that the Kingdom of God has arrived in the physical presence and ministry of Jesus Christ. The One God makes His present felt, *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit.

This is the ministry that we are called to continue, as God's redeemed people. We are now His dwelling place on Earth. We are the body of Christ. We are the place and the space that the One God would inhabit with anastatic power, in Jesus' name. As the Son of God exercised and expressed this ministry through his own humanity, he looks to do the same within us now. Just as he expressly commissioned his disciples, operating under his authority: a ministry given not only to the twelve apostles (**Matthew 10.7-8**) but also to the seventy two, sent out to towns in advance of Jesus' arrival in them (**Luke 10.8-9**). Just as He commissioned them, He now commissions us today.

The Ministry of the One, Triune God

In coming to discuss the giftings that our Heavenly Father would have us embrace, in a ministry expressed through Jesus and enabled by the anastatic empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we again meet with a revelation of the Oneness of God, expressing care and compassion into His Creation. The ministry of Jesus Christ is an expression of our Heavenly Father's will and purpose, for there is no distinction to be made between the will and purpose of Father and Son. Father and Son are united as the One God. He who is the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sanctifier is undifferentiated towards us in His actions. His actions and our experience of them are always executed in the unity that is *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit.

Jesus emphasised that whatever he actioned or spoke was in conformity with his Father's will. He made it clear that, "the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (**John 5.19**). Likewise, in his teaching Jesus declared, "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him" (**John 8.28-29**). There is complete harmony in the ministry of Jesus with his Father in Heaven. So also with the Holy Spirit, in His relation to the Father and the Son. All three are, integrally, the One God. As Jesus said, "All that belongs

to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you” (**John 16.15**).

We must therefore not separate, in our thinking or understanding of the One God, the ministry of the Holy Spirit from that of the Father and the Son. That which is truly of the Holy Spirit, fashioned in us and through us, is true of both Jesus and our Father in Heaven. It follows that any word or work that is not true to the Biblical revelation of God’s nature, pivotally made known in and through His Son, Jesus, cannot be a word or work of the Holy Spirit. Understanding this and holding to this vital criterion of authenticity will help us test and evaluate what is legitimately birthed of the Holy Spirit’s anastatic activity in ourselves and in others.

What the Holy Spirit enabled in and through the humanity of Jesus Christ, He would enable in us too. As Jesus was led to recall, we are led to recall. As Jesus would renounce and deny all that would detract him from Father’s will, so we need to deny and renounce distractions. As Jesus gave himself to be filled and enabled with the anastatic enabling of the Holy Spirit, so should we look for His infilling and enabling. It is what this implies for us, when we look to receive and be moved by the anastatic empowerment of God’s Gift to us in the Holy Spirit, that we look to now. We reflect on the place of the Gift’s giftings in our own ministry today.

Dealing with fear of the Affective

We have noted how the manner in which many church gatherings operate, in Western culture, is centred on cognitive process. Encultured among us is an expression of Christianity that celebrates our ability to give rational explanation to our relationship with God. One result of this is that clear parameters of behaviour, structure and belief will often be learnt and laid out for people to follow. What then becomes more difficult is making room for and giving expression to the unrehearsed and spontaneous, especially when it is expressed affectively rather than cognitively. For those who favour a cognitive approach to faith, emotional expression arising from the affective can be a challenge and a threat to good order. Fear of losing control of what is going to be said or expressed can be troubling.

The One God, however, can neither be circumscribed by a concept nor limited within a liturgy. Certainly, the Holy Spirit can and would give expression to the

words of a preacher and inhabit the praise of God's people, expressed in the words of prepared hymns and songs, within a planned and structured church meeting. He may, however, want to do more. What that 'more' may consist of is what we go on to explore now.

A kaleidoscope of giftings

The Holy Spirit is the Gift. What the One God brings to us are manifestations of the Holy Spirit's presence, enabling us to participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, to the glory of God our Father in Heaven. These manifestations of the Spirit's presence and power, at work in our lives, are given expression and can be identified as giftings we receive from God. Or are they?

The question needs to be framed, because of the way in which giftings are often spoken of, as the property or possession of separate people. Christians will sometimes identify what they sense their gifting to be, possibly referencing a Scripture passage that names different giftings. People may be encouraged, within church, to discover and articulate the gifting or giftings that God has given them, to be used in ministry and service. It may be a gifting of preaching and teaching, playing an instrument or singing, administration or prayerful intercession. Additionally, drawing upon more affective aspects of our nature, it may be referred to as a gifting of healing, exorcism, prophecy, words of knowledge, tongues or interpretation of tongues. A kaleidoscope of giftings belonging to different people may be identified and celebrated, each to be identified with specific people and their ministries. It is this differentiated identification of giftings, as the possession of separate people, that is here contested.

Ministering the giftings

In the central passages of Paul's first Corinthian letter, where the operation of the giftings of the Spirit is discussed in **1 Corinthians 12-14**, an understanding of how these giftings might function within the gathering of church is laid out. Paul had been emphasising, in the preceding chapter 11, the importance of recognising the corporate nature of the church as the body of Christ. Indeed, as we have seen, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is understood by Paul to involve a recognition by the church of sharing in the body and blood of Jesus Christ, focussing upon and remembering him. Paul's concern appears to be that

the Corinthian disciples had not been focussing on their shared, corporate identity in Jesus Christ. The Corinthian disciples appeared to have been acting as separate individuals who were part of an incidental gathering, failing to properly recognise and receive one another as integral parts of the body of Christ. In this regard, they were in danger of not, “discerning the body of Christ” (**1 Corinthians 11.29**).

Given the context of this message to the Corinthian church, it is questionable whether Christians should speak of the giftings of the Holy Spirit as if they were the separate possession of individual Christians. Such thinking is the antithesis of what Paul appears to have expressed in his writing. There is One Gift, which is the impartation and coming of the One God, that He might indwell His people. One body gathered together where, “to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (**1 Corinthians 12.7**). The focus is not to be on the separated manifestations of grace, enabled by the Holy Spirit. The focus is to be upon the presence and work of the Gift, the Holy Spirit, manifested through all the parts of the church. There is to be an awareness among disciples of the giftings’ partitive nature, distributed among all the members of the church. Complementary in their operation, the giftings express the presence of Jesus Christ, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit: the One God embracing His people as His earthly dwelling place, declaring words and manifesting ministries that enable and enhance communion of God among His people in worship. Giftings and ministries that give glory to God alone.

It is this concern, that the gathered church manifests both the presence and character of God, that causes Paul to exhort the Corinthian disciples, in **1 Corinthians 13**, to pursue love above all. The practice of love, a characteristic of God and fruit of the Holy Spirit’s presence in us, is something that disciples need to take responsibility in developing and expressing. The giftings, however, are the provenance of the Holy Spirit, the Gift received into our lives from God. The manifestation of giftings comes from the Holy Spirit, not from us. We are responsible for properly managing these manifestations, as we minister in God’s presence. We are, however, to seek after the infilling of the Gift in our lives, not to simply pursue the giftings for themselves. The giftings are manifestations of the Gift’s presence and power at work within us, as the church. They are not badges of ministry for us to claim and display for our exaltation.

We will explore, in the next chapter, how ministries can develop and mature, expressed through the lives of Christian disciples. For now we note that people can and should learn to grow in whatever ministry that God has called them to

and enables them for, in every season of life, with the Gift expressing Himself in and through their life. The marks of an authentic ministry will be self-emptying, service, humility and obedience. We can and should look to grow in the areas of ministry that God has appointed us for. Our ministry is to be in the manner of Jesus, looking to express his character and love, pursuing the kenotic path of service and obedience. Giftings remain, however, expressions of the Gift given to the whole body of Christ on Earth. Giftings are not, nor should be construed as being, personal possessions of the people through whom the Holy Spirit is working. Giftings never belong to us. They are manifested through us. They belong to the Gift.

I have taken time to labour this point because of a dismissal and rejection that not infrequently occurs within church, especially in the area of the more affective giftings: I think here especially of giftings of healing, prophecy, speaking in tongues and their interpretation. All of these are for the edification and upbuilding of the gathered church. When a person imagines that the manifestation of a gifting is their possession, a gift bestowed on them for their own use, the way is opened for misuse, fabrication or imitation. This was the case with seven sons of Sceva, who sought to imitate the deliverance ministry of the Apostle Paul (**Acts 19.13-16**). I myself have seen giftings – both cognitive and affective in nature – fabricated or imitated, often by good people who have simply failed to realise that the giftings of the Spirit can never be their own possession. The giftings are manifested in the church by the Gift. And the Gift would work to manifest in us the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ; and do for God's glory alone.

The natural World around us, in all its marred beauty and glory, is subject to change and decay because of our separation, our failure to be fully synchronised with each other in communion with God. Our present, natural World is spoilt and sullied by the effects of human selfishness; and sinful, human refusal to honour and worship the One God, the Father who sustains and renews His Creation through His Son and by His Spirit. Through Jesus Christ's disciples, this can begin to change.

When the One God comes to inhabit us, His gathered people, it is truly a supernatural event and presence of God that is experienced. The presence and manifestation of the Gift among us supersedes the present natural order, suffusing and filling us, manifesting something of what is to come, the complete transformation of us and the whole Cosmos. The church is the context in which this expression of life in its fullness, for now, is to be evidenced: where the

supernatural invades the spacial, bringing a foretaste of what will be truly natural when full, cosmic renewal comes and God's glory covers all the Earth. The church is to serve as an open door through which the whole of Creation might glimpse what is coming, observing and experiencing tokens of what the One God has done and would do for all who would welcome Him into their life.

Touching on Tongues

One area of affective experience that invites special mention is the gifting of tongues, named in Greek as *glossolalia*. This is necessary not only because *glossolalia* are a common manifestation but also because it is this gifting that is often most ridiculed and maligned. A word of personal testimony is appropriate here. I have valued this gifting and its personal use in my life for over forty five years. I find it a beautiful way of expressing myself to God in private prayer, bringing a rich enjoyment of the Holy Spirit's presence upon and within me. It helps me in adoring and giving thanks to God, leading into supplication and intercession for others. It deeply grieves me when I hear Christians speak disparagingly of this manifestation of the Gift. What is the nature of this gifting?

My own understanding is that the gifting of tongues is born out of a need to find words that might give more adequate expression of praise and glory to the One God, when our own imagination and vocabulary proves insufficient. Wonderfully, it represents God negating, by the power of Jesus' victory, the curse of Babel (**Genesis 11.9**), when the confusion and multiplicity of human languages arose through mankind seeking to elevate themselves to the status of gods. With a renewed identity in Christ, the Gift releases language that resonates to the glory of God. It may not be a language with which I am familiar, or is readily recognised by others. For this reason, it is best used in private devotion. This gifting, as with others, can be misused. It can be mimicked and fabricated. But it is an impartation to be experienced and enjoyed when the Gift chooses to activate it in our lives, in worship of God.

Chapter 19

Experiencing Discipleship Development

What we see in Jesus is the enactment and the fulfilment of Israel's calling as a historically shaped community. The struggles in the life and ministry of Jesus mirror the challenges that faced the people of Israel, challenges that they failed in. What we see in Jesus is a life that triumphs over the same challenges, leading through to the victory of resurrection. In the same way, as we come to participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, we find that we are participating in the very life of Jesus, drawn through the experiences of challenge, even suffering. We are drawn forward, through being joined to Jesus Christ in his death, towards the New Creation, enabled by the same anastatic power that was at work in his bodily resurrection.

There can be a beauty in Christmas and our celebration of the Incarnation. When we look at the tenderness and vulnerability of a baby that is God's gift to humanity. It can be a time that reminds us to celebrate the self-emptying of the Son of God, come to be the Messiah of Israel and the Redeemer of the World.

There can be a beauty in Easter and our celebration of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, redeeming sinners and rescuing us from God's wrath and the power of death. When we look at the wounds and the pain of this man, we see in him the gift that conveys the love of God for humanity. It can be a time that reminds us to celebrate the Son of God's body broken and blood poured out for us.

There can be a beauty in Pentecost and our celebration of the Gift of the Holy Spirit, poured out from the Heavens into the church, sealing us and filling us with the presence of God. When we long for and are filled by the Spirit, it can be a time that reminds us of how God indwells us with His presence and purposeful power; and would accompany us throughout life's journey.

The challenge lies in holding all three of these together, in a way that develops and equips us as disciples of Jesus Christ. To walk upon a trajectory that begins with Christmas and passes through both Easter and Pentecost. To grasp that the Son of God fully entered our humanity to become like us, that we might become like him. That in doing so he emptied himself and walked in a life of service and with a humility expressed through obedience, that we might have a pattern and example to follow. That not only did he bear the punishment for our sins on the

Cross of Calvary, but that he passed through death and into bodily resurrection that we might see the path we must pursue. A path of service and obedience that looks to truly worship God, as well to receiving the reward that awaits us. To realise that all this can only be done through the enabling and empowering of the Holy Spirit, infusing us and changing us through His refuelling of our lives.

Holding Christmas, Easter and Pentecost together is necessary if we are to truly experience faith. When we pursue a path whereby we recall, renounce and refuel. This is the challenge of experiencing faith in discipleship development.

Developing Devotion

There is no escaping personal responsibility. Formed to be the people we are, whether by nature or nurture, each of us needs to engage with life as it faces us. Whatever we feel about the circumstance and situation we find ourselves in, we have to own responsibility for the actions that we take. This applies for us in the life of faith, as much as it does for life in society at large, when it comes to developing as a disciple. All that church might be, all the ways that discipleship might be developed and crafted, must begin with each of us taking personal responsibility in looking to progress into a more deeply rooted relationship with the One God.

Developing an ever deepening relationship with God can seem at times like an uphill struggle. It is not easy, for people like you and me. It's like trying to drive rubber ducks down into a bath of water. Bad habits and temptation to lure us onto a wrong path keep popping up again and again. Prayer can also be hard to enter into. So many distractions. It takes determination to read the Bible on a regular basis. This path of progress can become more manageable, though, when we embrace the three focus points of Recall, Renounce and Refuel.

Wanting

Recall is important, for it confronts each of us with a challenge and opportunity. Do I really want to be in fellowship with and close to my Creator? Is it a priority in my life? Do I want to receive eternal life, worship God and participate in the life, the ministry and the victory of the One who in Jesus declared himself to be, "the way and the truth and the life" (**John 14.6**)? It was this challenge that was given to Israel, as a people, when they were positioned on the threshold of entering the Promised Land. Blessings and warnings were laid out before them

in the Song of Moses, in **Deuteronomy 32**. Did they really want to belong to and worship their Creator? To reject the ways of the other, pagan nations and embrace the way of the One God? This is also a question and challenge that faces each of us today. We must respond to it again and again, if we are to progress and develop in the Christian life.

It begins with Recall. To intentionally recall the character of God, so that we can have an understanding of His Person, presence, priorities and power operating in us: characteristics that we find in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. By God's grace, expressed into us by the mighty workings of His Holy Spirit, these are characteristics that can come to be formed in our own lives. Wanting to be more like God, participators in the divine nature, arises out of our recalling the character of God and His call to us, into holiness and conformity to His ways. This summons finds expression in both Old and New Testaments. In the former, it is a call to conform to the One God. In the latter, it is a call to focus on the characteristics of this One God made manifest in Jesus Christ; and to want to be conformed to him, exhibiting his character in our own lives.

Wanting more of God arises out of recalling both who God is and what He has done. Recalling what is chronicled in the Bible. It also helps to recall what God has been doing in our own lives and in the lives of others who pursue the path of discipleship alongside us. Sharing our personal experience of faith with others is important, both for ourselves and for those with whom we journey along the path of discipleship. In this way we remind ourselves and each other that the Kingdom of God is actively breaking through, into our lives, in many different ways.

Telling and sharing stories of God's active intervention in our lives also serves as a vital, counter-narrative to the contrary stories that we are exposed to, in the media through movies, news-reporting and TV dramas. TV, cinema and popular newspapers and magazines rarely recognise or give glory to God and His sovereign intervention in the lives of people. We live in a World that is saturated in sin, dominated by Powers and Principalities that are in rebellion against God. Collective recall of God's Kingdom activity is essential in releasing us into to a place where we will want to develop as Jesus' disciples.

Willing

Wanting to grow in our experience of faith is one thing. To be willing to grow is another. Our second focus point, Renounce, should help us here. There is no progress to be made, in developing as a disciple, unless we each acknowledge that there are habits, propensities and relationships that we need to renounce: aspects of our lives that inhibit our growth in worship and effective service of God. Renouncing is necessary in progressing along the discipleship path. We do enquirers small service when we fail to point this out. As Jesus emptied and humbled himself, so must each of us, again and again. Part of the value of gathering, in being persons in plurality, is that we can encourage, exhort – and sometimes rebuke – one another, in pursuing this Jesus path. Every one of us needs this. The Holy Spirit will, through this process, bring each of us into conviction with regard to aspects of our life and living that we need to address. Part of the way that the Spirit will express Himself to each of us will be through other disciples, people who are part of that plurality of persons who constitute the community we experience as church. Our wanting to develop needs to lead each of us into a willingness to change and be transformed by the Holy Spirit. Anamnesis needs to be followed by kenosis. Recalling must be accompanied by renouncing.

Co-workers

God has not drawn us to Jesus Christ in order that we become better customers. We are to be more than consumers of His mercy and grace. God has called us to be His priests, His own people, as He advances His Kingdom upon Earth. Thankfully, Jesus Christ succeeded where Adam had failed. Jesus fully expressed God's image and likeness in exercising proper authority upon Earth. Now, as part of our life in Christ, we are caught up in a ministry that does not depend on our ability to succeed. Our ministry draws its strength from the ministry of Jesus Christ. Its power comes from the anastatic enabling of the Holy Spirit. This is released, in and through us, in a ministry that flows from and is rooted in relationship with our Heavenly Father. As we recall and renounce, we are to look for a refuelling *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, this vision is not always embraced by us. Where we fail to grasp the dynamic relationship that God has called us into with Himself, the One God, reaching out to us *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit; and if we lose sight of the shape of the Son of God's humanity, we can fail both in

ministry and in developing as disciples. We are then in danger of turning our worship into a fleshly thing, by offering to God only our natural talents and abilities. This is not what God requires of us. He wants us to seek after the pleasure of our Father as manifested in Jesus Christ, craving infilling by the Holy Spirit. When our vision of Christianity becomes separated from the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ, it leads us into false and powerless religion. When we cease to become dependent on the Holy Spirit to enable and empower us, we are on the road to failure and collapse.

Growing in character

There are two aspects to being co-workers, in discipleship development. Each of us has to grow in experiencing what it means to be a co-worker of God, learning to be attuned to God's will and desires. Each of us also has to grow into being co-workers with other people, as part of that plurality of persons constituting the Body of Christ.

We will, in the next chapter, look at how we might better express ministry under the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Then, in the following chapter, we will go on to look at how we might approach the challenge of forming ministries that have more effective structures serving them. First, we need again to address the challenge of character.

We have already noted the importance of distinguishing between the Holy Spirit as the Gift and manifestations of the Spirit as giftings. It is the Gift that we are to seek after and crave, for He draws us and transforms us into greater conformity to Jesus Christ. For this reason, we need to focus on the importance of developing virtues that shape us into greater conformity to the character of Jesus Christ. This quest after the virtues that shape character can, once more, be helpfully coordinated through using our three focus points. As we look to recall the virtues and character that we observe in Jesus Christ, we need to go on from there to renounce markers of our own identity that conflict or contradict what we see in Jesus. As Jesus emptied himself, so must we. As Jesus took to himself the nature of a servant, so must we. As Jesus humbled himself and looked to be obedient, so must we.

This is a far cry from asserting our own vision, affirming our own identity and discovering our own giftings. My own observation is that teaching and exhortation to do these very things leads to a diminution in the discipline of

discipleship. It is a folly to ask someone, who has not learnt how to renounce godlessness in their life, to cast a vision for their own ministry. It is false counsel to encourage a person, whose life is saturated in sin, to affirm their own identity and pursue their own desires. It is extremely misleading to lead a person towards discovering giftings they might have from God, when they have not first learnt how to recall the pattern of who they truly are that is revealed in Jesus Christ. Every one of us needs to proceed from recalling into renouncing what does not conform to the pattern of Jesus in our lives; and then look to the Holy Spirit, that He might freshly affirm in us our new identity in Jesus Christ, that we might pursue the virtues that the Spirit develops and the character He would shape within us all.

Experiencing faith, through participating in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, demands a radical response in facing the challenge of living. It leads the disciple into asking the question, 'how might I serve in this situation, in a way that conforms to the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ?'. It does not begin by asking the question, 'what are my gifts?'. Nor does it invite us to ask others, 'how can you make use of me and my gifts?'. In recalling the pattern of Jesus Christ, this way begins by self-emptying and being liberated to discover the role of a servant, undertaking whatever appropriate service might be required. This is the Jesus way.

How do we discover the commands of God for our lives? Obedience is worked out through acknowledging that each one of us is called to be part of a plurality of persons, in our worship of God. We are not to face the challenges of life as atomised, separated individuals. The Jesus way involves humbling ourselves. This requires the presence of other people, among whom we pursue humility through service. Our agenda is then transformed. We become attentive to the condition and the needs of others, rather than looking for an opportunity to pursue our own path. We also look to discern the command of God in the company of others, mindful of how prone each of us can be to self-deception. It is in pursuing this way, as disciples of Jesus Christ, that we discover our need of others to confirm, challenge and correct us, helping us to proceed along the path of anastatic empowerment that further develops discipleship among us.

In pursuing a focus on Recall, Renounce and Refuel, we discover how important it is to walk this way in the company of other people who are part of a plurality. It is this way that truly pleases God, inviting the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself. When we gather together, in a space and place that accommodates us, the Holy

Spirit would then manifest Himself within our gathering, in ways that draw us into worship of our Heavenly Father, bringing glory to Jesus Christ.

Many times, I have experienced the manifestation of giftings released into a Christian gathering, when there has been an expression of both our emptiness and utter need of the Gift to visit with us. I have witnessed giftings being manifested in church gatherings through people who had never before experienced what it is to serve through the use of giftings such as prophecy, healing and words of knowledge. The Holy Spirit manifests provision when we pursue the path of Jesus Christ, bringing to us giftings of grace that are imparted into the lives of needy people.

God loves you completely. He wants to affirm you in His love. And the best way He has of doing this is to make you more like Jesus. Anything else is shortchanging you. And the One God does not shortchange anyone. You will find, as you pursue Recall, Renounce and Refuel, that you will experience giftings from the Gift in serving others that you have never experienced before. Some of them you might never experience again. What matters is that you have cast yourself as a living sacrifice before God, saying, 'Take me, fill me, use me and lead me in any way you want to do whatever you want, wherever you want. Take me as your child. Allow me to manifest the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Show me how I might serve. Take me as a participator in His life, for Jesus Christ is my everything, now and always'.

Recall, Renounce, Refuel. Anamnesis, Kenosis, Anastasis. A.K.A. Christian.

Chapter 20

Experiencing faith in ministry

Ministry is not a status. It is an action. To minister is to serve. A minister is someone who serves. You only have a ministry if you are seeking to serve. We have seen how important it is to develop virtues and grow in character. This also requires other people around us. Our development takes place through honing and refining the way that we interact with the One God; and the way that we interact with other people. In forming an understanding of ministry that can function amidst the challenges of a rapidly changing culture and context, we need to build on what we have noted with regard to experiencing a faith that embraces Recall, Renounce and Refuel. In seeking to build on this understanding of ministry, we go on to address issues of Identity, Plurality, Intensity and Fluidity.

Identity

We have noted how, as disciples, our identity is now in Jesus Christ. And yet we are not fully removed from experiencing sin in our lives. Much of the time, we struggle with reactions and feelings that arise from hurts we have experienced in the past and also deep insecurities that we feel, formed in us from life's bumpy ride. We accede to the proposition that we have been reborn into a new life of faith and salvation; yet we also continue to find ourselves captives to responses and emotions that have been formed from our life outwith our submission to Jesus Christ.

To minister out of our new identity in Jesus Christ, we have to fully embrace our new identity as a child of God. There is a need to repeatedly recall what the Son of God has done for us, in coming to share in our humanity through his Incarnation, which we celebrate at Christmas. To remember that he became, "fully human in every way" (**Hebrews 2.17**), so that we might become fully like him.

Likewise with Easter, in celebrating his atoning sacrifice in his bearing our sins and the punishment for them, we have also to remember that there on the Cross, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (**2 Corinthians 5.21**). He died so that we

might experience God's forgiveness and also become bearers of his righteousness, demonstrated in our lives.

So it is that we need the Gift that comes at Pentecost. We then recall, "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (**Acts 2.33**). We become vessels into which the Holy Spirit is poured. We become instruments empowered for the purposes of God.

The three of these celebrations, held together, invite us to recall the significant power that God has exercised in order to bring about a new identity in us, born of the love of our Heavenly Father, that we might be filled with the Holy Spirit and learn to minister in Jesus' name.

To enter properly into this alternative identity, we have to learn to renounce our old one. This can be extremely difficult. It is one thing to want to die to sinful, destructive desires and habits. It is quite another to renounce aspects of our self-identity that make us socially acceptable, lauded and approved of by others. Our old identity will have features that have been, for each of us, indicators of success and status; affirming us as valued among others, including within church. Now, we cannot ignore what we may have worked to achieve in life; but we will have to decide whether it is going to define us or not, in the way we view ourselves and also in the way we engage with others. In the same way, we have to decide whether we are willing to detach ourselves from failures and faults that haunt us, which have affected both our lives and the lives of others. Where we are going to live with our new identity in Jesus Christ, whatever we have achieved or failed in the past becomes irrelevant. Jesus calls us into a new identity and to a status where we are completely new. Learn how to die. And then learn how to be made to be alive again by the One God.

Learn to wait upon and look for that affirmation which is more valuable than any you might receive from the past or from people around you. Learn to bask in the approval that the One God gives you, loving you and caring for you as His precious child. Wait upon and tarry for the suffusive presence and power of the Holy Spirit coming upon you and rising within you, to fill you. Learn how to be made alive again by the One God.

Plurality

Whatever ministries the Lord would use you in, understand that they are an expression of God's giftings to the church. They are dependent on the volition of God and the activating presence and power of the Holy Spirit within your life. You are a person, valued and loved by God, who is called to be set among others. A person who is part of a plurality. Your existence is defined not as a sole individual. You have been rescued from a life, atomised and fragmented. Your ministry and the identity that you now have finds expression and is to operate within the plurality of a royal priesthood and a holy nation. You have been made by God to be integrally part of the church, the body of Jesus Christ upon the Earth. Recall how God deals with His people, affirming the value of this plurality, both within Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament. Do not allow the Satan to sequester you, ripping you from your birthright in Christ. You belong to the family of Jesus Christ, the church. You are not just by yourself.

Being a person who is part of a plurality requires us to renounce, in terms of operating in the giftings of the Holy Spirit and the ministries enabled thereby, an independence of spirit. This can be really difficult. We live in a society that pretends to value the independence of everyone as a freely, self-determining person. In God's Kingdom, there is no such thing. We have to renounce the right for self-determination and to embrace submission to our Heavenly Father's will and way, in Jesus name. We renounce the right to be right! We recognise that not one of us receives all of the giftings of the Gift. We are to be part of that plurality of persons that makes up church. There the giftings that the Gift manifests in us are complemented by the giftings and ministries that the Gift imparts to others.

When I tarry in prayer, crying out for the Gift to operate giftings that manifest anastatic power among God's people, I need to learn to rejoice in what the Gift imparts to others, that they might play their part, as God has decreed. Learning not to be jealous of others and of what God is doing through them is part of this process. I need to accept the humblest, lowliest opportunity to serve. To want to be used in a way that brings glory not to me, but to the One God who deserves all praise and glory. When this attitude is found among us, God pours out His presence and power on His children, in the mystery of that impartation of grace that is *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes upon me, He lifts me up so that I might delight in my Heavenly

Father's abundant love. He reminds me that I have a place within a plurality of persons, beloved children of God, that make up the church.

Intensity

We have noted that the Holy Spirit comes upon people with different levels of intensity at different times, in different places. He can come in the breath of Jesus. He can come in the mighty wind of Pentecost. Any narrative that declares that the Holy Spirit is the Gift given to the church at Pentecost, remaining with us as an inert or insensate presence thereafter, has to be challenged: it does not accord with Biblical narratives. A claim to control or circumscribe the work of the Gift would be the invention of a corrupted form of church that seeks to assert control over the means of grace by which the Holy Spirit makes Himself present among us. We challenge and refute any such narrative. We would not negate the way that the Holy Spirit would use the Sacraments and other means of grace to accomplish His work within church. We would, however, note that the Biblical accounts, earlier rehearsed in Part 1, lead us to an understanding that affirms the Holy Spirit as the Creator Spirit, active in and sustaining all of the Cosmos; yet coming to indwell and work through the body of Christ, the plurality of persons who participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, in a specially intense way. In a way that allows us to speak of the Holy Spirit as God's Gift, imparting giftings to and throughout the Body of Christ, the church. Dynamic and powerfully present. Looking to visit with us with intimacy and intensity.

To experience faith in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, we need to renounce. To renounce our own ability to operate with any power that is effective in advancing of the Kingdom of God. We need to come to a place, as persons in plurality, where we cry out to God and express our emptiness and need of the Gift to fill us and enable us for ministry. We need to face our impotency and not deny the state we find ourselves in. To do this, we will at times have to ask God to humble us and bring us to a point where we both recognise and feel our need of His intensified presence in our life. This is not easy and it is not readily gained when we are insulated, blinded and sated by pride and pretension. Yet as God dealt with Israel again and again, bringing His people to the point where they acknowledged their need of Him, so He would do with us.

We need to live in hope for a visitation of anastatic empowerment, lifting us up and enabling us for more effective ministry in Jesus' name. We need to want that liberating intensity of the Holy Spirit that might well shake us and disorientate us, shattering the ministry we already have and releasing us into something different. Where it is no longer we who are in charge, with our choices. But where the Holy Spirit affirms His might, drawing us to view the sovereignty of Father worked out in a new way in our lives, as we gaze on the wonder of God made known in the face of Jesus Christ. The intensity of the Spirit shatters the image of our own reflection, wherein we ponder our own ministry in the mirror of pride. Instead, He places before us a portrait of Jesus, for us to step into. This is what an intense visitation of the Holy Spirit brings to us.

Fluidity

We have noted how the Bible portrays the Holy Spirit. He is a Person, the third Person of the One God, reaching into us from the Father and through the Son. He is also fluid. He cannot be definitively depicted by us, for He is like the wind and He is like water. He can manifest as fire and He can come in a cloud. He can appear as in bodily form, like a dove. He transcends the Heavens and the Earth and is, in His power and purposefulness, unimaginably great. Yet in coming upon us, He also inhabits us as the Gift that is from our Heavenly Father, in Jesus' name. He does not crush us or lead us into despair. He teaches us and He accompanies us. Without Him, we have no ministry, we have no giftings, we have no power. But when He comes to baptise us and to fill us, all things are possible.

We need to learn how to renounce the things that fill and satisfy us, competing with the Holy Spirit in filling us. Our culture bloats our senses with constant access to audio and visual stimulation, in a menu of options unprecedented in human history. Likewise, we have opportunity to gorge ourselves on a variety of foods and drinks. In such a world, it is hard to find a place for thirsting and hungering for the Holy Spirit's infilling. Finding time and space for prayer, to adore God and tarry for His anointing upon us and the rise of the Spirit's fountainhead within us, has to be determinedly pursued. Fasting may well help by accentuating our hunger, expressing our longing and desire to be filled by the Holy Spirit.

When He comes upon us, He can make Himself known to us in so many different ways. We can never contain Him in a space or place. His outpouring is unlimited

in its capacity. He will pour into us to accomplish whatever God has determined to accomplish. He brings anastatic power to release the giftings of the Gift into our lives.

A different identity. Plurality. Intensity. Fluidity. All of these matter, in receiving the Gift and in understanding how the giftings of the Holy Spirit give birth to ministries that are expressed through our lives. It is to how these giftings and ministries might be better structured among us, to release the body of Christ in effective ministry, that we now turn to explore.

Chapter 21

Experiencing Tent and Temple

In reviewing how giftings and ministries might be better managed among us, releasing the body of Christ into more effective ministry, we should begin with the reminder that we do not belong to ourselves. We were bought at a price, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In owning him as our Saviour and Lord, we acknowledge that we belong to God. More than belonging. We have become the dwelling place of God's powerful presence and purposefulness, that we may participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

But are we parts of a Tent or a Temple? In the journeyings of ancient Israel, God gave instructions in Sinai for the construction of the Tabernacle Tent, to be able to move with the people whenever God led them forward. The Tabernacle Tent held, placed at its heart, the Ark of God's Covenant. This was, quite literally, to be at the centre of Israel's life. It journeyed with them in their travels as a journeying people. It was only when King David had it on his heart to build a Temple for God in Jerusalem that a Temple, built by King Solomon, was appointed to be the place where God would meet with His people. For a season. Then the Temple of Solomon was destroyed when the faithfulness of God's people died. As was to happen again, well after the people returned from exile, when Herod's Temple was torn down by the Romans.

So, Tent or Temple? For travelling or a permanent place? Jesus declared that, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (**Matthew 8.20**); but he also said, in referring to his own body, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (**John 2.19**). What Jesus draws us into is a life that is centred on him and him alone. There is neither a travelling tent nor a static building to be identified as the permanent location of church. There is only the organic life of that plurality of persons of whom Jesus declared, "where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (**Matthew 18.20**). We are to be the dwelling place of the Gift. Malleable. Moveable. Manifesting giftings and ministries that demonstrate our participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

This dwelling place of God's glory, made up of a gathering of living stones, is defined by Jesus and his life, ministry and victory alone. We are a people in

whom the Holy Spirit would dwell, manifesting giftings and ministries to the glory of God. We now go on to explore how these giftings and ministries might be structured among us, again looking at them in the contexts of Identity, Plurality, Intensity and Fluidity.

Identity

We are to be a people who know and enjoy intimacy with the One God. Intimacy with God is now the source of our identity. This intimacy with God arises out of the Son of God's incarnate intimacy, as a human being, with both his Father and the Holy Spirit. Drawn to share in his humanity, into his body, we are drawn to share in that intimacy, the mystery at the heart of the One God. Intimacy is to be experienced.

Intimacy with the One God is also all consuming. God will entertain no rivals, no competing lovers. As God repeatedly demonstrated to ancient Israel, His love is a jealous love. God knows it is also the only love that can fully satisfy those whom He has made in His image, the recipients of His love and care. We are being refashioned to bear the the image and likeness of the unbegotten Son of God, Jesus Christ. For this reason we bear the name, 'Christians'. It is through the Son of God become man that we discover our true identity. The structure of church should, therefore, operate to facilitate giftings and ministries expressed among us that conform to the giftings and ministries manifested by Jesus Christ. Such structures are present not in order to express something *to* Jesus Christ. Structures are there primarily to express something *of* Jesus Christ. We are to be enabled by the Holy Spirit, caught up in Jesus Christ's life of holistic worship before our Heavenly Father. This means there is a need to teach and model a life of worship that is rooted in Jesus Christ. Disciples need to be encouraged to engage in questions that explore the implications of belonging to Jesus Christ, in terms of their personal and corporate lives. It also means that we should structure church in order that it might sustain an environment that releases people to proclaim and demonstrate the presence of the Kingdom of God.

To embrace this identity, we have to recall afresh what the Bible actually says about our identity in Jesus Christ. About his character. About the giftings and ministry he expressed through his humanity. About how those were expressed in the New Testament church. We will need to renounce false identities that have left us with structures that become static, stale and stagnant. We will have to look, in humility, for fresh anastatic empowering.

For all of us, this will bring the challenge of looking for refreshed expression, as church, not only in how the Gift of the Holy Spirit imparts to us communicative giftings such as wisdom, knowledge and prophecy. We will also have to learn to look afresh to the Gift, in order to minister and express giftings of healing, miraculous powers and distinguishing between spirits: all of which are giftings, manifested in the ministry of Jesus Christ, that Paul assumed were present within the early church gathering. The Holy Spirit recognised as their source, we need to affirm the full panoply of giftings that the Gift imparts in Jesus' name (**1 Corinthians 12.4-11**).

Furthermore, although the gifting of tongues is not an essential part of our identity in Jesus Christ, as Paul counsels the Corinthian church, "in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue" (**1 Corinthians 14.19**). We need to recognise that affective expression can occur when the Holy Spirit comes to fill our less than holy lives with His Holy presence and power. The Gift will express the giftings He sees as appropriate, in advancing the Kingdom of God. Giftings and ministries are not ways of bolstering our own identity. They are a means of expressing worship of God as part of our new identity, in Jesus Christ.

Plurality

Our new identity is experienced through each of us functioning as a person, set by God within a plurality of persons. The partitive nature of our personhood, properly expressed and fulfilled in relationship with others, is the context wherein we find giftings and ministries imparted and activated at different times and in different ways throughout our Christian lives. Each of us will discover, as we pass along the course of time, that there is no single set of giftings or ministries that God imparts to us. Different giftings will enable different ministries that find different expressions in different places and at different times. It will depend on the need of the moment and the context we are in. What matters is that there is, at the heart of it all, a looking by us to the Gift, that He might manifest among us that which expresses His anastatic empowerment in Jesus' name.

This call to find identity within plurality, so counter-intuitive to an individualist mindset, is reinforced by recalling and reflecting on Old Testament narratives. When Israel was right with God, people vested their identity in being part of a

greater whole, giving their lives for the care and covenant purposefulness of the whole people of God. When they set their sights on doing what they chose for themselves, separate from the good of the nation or the pleasure of God, tragedy usually followed.

We have already noted how we need to renounce an identity centred on individualism and the atomisation of our lives, torn from meaningful relationship with others. So too, we need to renounce a quest after giftings and ministries for ourselves as separate people. We need to renounce any proprietorial claim to a gifting, a ministry or an office in the church. Instead, we should look for the whole panoply of giftings and ministries, expressed by the Holy Spirit into the lives of the whole company of people that constitute church, that we might be made more effective in the advance of the Kingdom of God through the church. This means we also need to renounce any hunger to be simply customers or consumers, feeding on other people's ministries. Each of us has a place. Each of us matters. Each of us has a ministry, as part of the Body of Christ. Each of us has to stand alongside others and seek after the coming of the Gift upon us, as did the nascent church (**Acts 1.14**), that the Holy Spirit might release His giftings and ministries among all of God's people.

For this, we need again to look for anastatic empowerment. We have to gather together and seek together. We need to cry out to God in prayer that His Kingdom presence be released on Earth as in Heaven, that His will be done and lived out among us. This is what the power of anastasis would release among us, to refuel us for effective ministry.

Intensity

We must not be afraid of losing control. We need to seek after God's control, not our own. In one sense, the Day of Pentecost appeared to produce a mayhem. When the Holy Spirit comes upon people with intensity, it may well appear that they are drunk (**Acts 2.13**). We have to recall and embrace the Scriptural testimony afresh. There is, when little progress is being made in the saving of souls and the extension of the Kingdom of God on Earth, a high likelihood that lives will be disturbed and disrupted if progress is to be made. Repentance from bondage to sin is required among us. Both leaders and members need to renounce the need to keep control of church in the way we have grown used to, in a way that we are comfortable with.

When the Holy Spirit falls upon us with fresh intensity, He will release giftings and ministries that have been both neglected and suppressed. It is inevitable that, when the Gift moves in anastatic empowerment, He will roll away stones from graves and cause dry bones to be enlivened and filled with life in new ways. There will be a rattling. And this will always be unsettling when we have become fonder of the familiar, than with freshly released intensity and liberating power by the Holy Spirit. Fresh wine needs fresh wineskins. When the wine is poured out, structures have to change. Or perish forever.

Fluidity

It is important that we do not settle down into one shape or in one place. The church today may not be a tent, but neither is it a temple of stone. The New Testament church appears to have found expression in different ways, with a variety of structures and formats. We need to discover the wisdom of this again today. The Gift of the Holy Spirit cannot be sealed in bottles or other containers. He is fluid and permeates all. We need to repeatedly recall how the God of Israel declared that He would not be confined or contained. Instead, He chose to reveal Himself as the One God who declares, 'I will be who I will be' (**Genesis 3.14**). The God of Israel reveals Himself as One better rendered as a verb, rather than a noun. He is dynamic. Energetic. Fluid in His coming towards us, as the Spirit who draws us into the life of the Son that we might live to the glory of the Father. 'Hear, Israel. The Lord our God. The Lord is One!' (**Deuteronomy 6.4**).

Accept that God has not called you to settle into one way of being church, with a restricted set of giftings allowed and a certain number of ministries recognised and commissioned, to the exclusion of others. Don't get stuck. Stuck means death. Instead, look for the Gift to come as the wind, the living water and flames of fire. Recognise that this is not a search for novelty but the quest for more of the Holy Spirit's experienced reality, fuelling faith and driving us forward in anastatic empowerment. We want to see rivers that spring up and burst out into the desert, that a verdant harvest may appear where now there is only dry, parched ground. Look for and yearn for the fluidity of the Gift to fill you, that you might be released more fully into the destiny that God has and would enable you for, as a Son or Daughter of the Living God.

Chapter 22

Recalling for Mission

The Chicken and the Egg

Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? The question matters, as we come to look at how our three focus points of Recall, Renounce and Refuel might effect the way we approach the challenge of mission. But first, we need to explain what we mean by mission. For our purposes here, we'll define mission as the church reaching out to and engaging with others, so that those who are not Jesus' disciples may have the opportunity to experience faith and come to participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ.

At the time of writing, countries are beginning to take steps to come out of the worldwide, Coronavirus Lockdown. People are asking the question, 'what will life look like afterwards?' We hear many express that it will be different from what life was like before the pandemic broke. In church circles, many welcome that news. Two statistics are commonly mentioned. Surveys during this period have suggested that whilst 10% of the population may go to church, 90% don't; yet some 25% of the population have been searching for spiritual meaning to life. At the same time, churches that have taken their meetings online have found that attendance, in terms of viewers, has multiplied. Something's going on. There's opportunity here. The conclusion seems obvious. Things have to change.

But what has to change? The way we do mission or the way we do church? Which is the chicken and which is the egg? In these concluding three chapters, we will employ our three focus points to look at how we might better engage with people, so that others might have an opportunity to engage with the reality of the One God; and to help them come to a place where they can meaningfully enter and experience faith in their lives, developing as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Where we've been

Before we try to imagine what engaging in mission might better look like, it would be useful to look back and recall – even in the broadest terms that follow - how mission has been engaged in the past.

The Old Testament

The people of Israel were called out, from among the nations of the world, to belong to the One God in a special way. In looking to the period before the coming of the Messiah, we see that the role of Israel was to be a testimony to the reality of the One God; and to be a means of blessing all nations, causing people to repent and turn in worship to experience faith in God. This involved people receiving and embracing the revelation of the One God, through those who bore His name. As God declared, “Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him” (**Genesis 18.18**).

God's blessing was expressed through the covenant promises of God, as declared to Abraham, Issac and Jacob; to Moses; to King David; and in the New Covenant, expressed by the prophet Jeremiah, when God declared, “This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the LORD. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people” (**Jeremiah 31.33**). All of these covenant promises exhibited a developing trajectory, whereby God would take the people of Israel and cause them to be a testimony and sign of the goodness and glory of God before all peoples on Earth.

The primary requirement, on Israel's part, was that they should conform to the ways that God instructed them to follow and adhere to, given in the Law of Moses. The Law was expressed in the commands that God delivered at Mount Sinai, during Israel's journeying out from Egyptian captivity towards the land God had called them to inhabit and populate. Above all, the requirement was that Israel should be a community of people who were truly worshippers of God. This worship was to be expressed not only in their convictions but also in their practices, in every area of daily life and work. Everything about them, in their living, was to be marked by distinctively belonging to the One God.

The New Testament

Jesus, in his life and ministry, made no departure from these Old Testament patterns and priorities. His words, both of rebuke and exhortation, were addressed to people whom he called to live, manifesting the rule of God in their lives, as persons in plurality. Jesus' sermons and parables were fashioned to call the people of Israel back into a proper relationship with God and, in relationships with other people, to practices that were an expression of the character of God. Indeed, it was the pursuit of these patterns and priorities that brought Jesus into conflict with those whose religion had become barren and brittle, devoid of the manifest presence and power of God. The dynamic presence of the One God, manifested in the words, works and ways of Jesus, was a threat and a challenge to them. So they had him crucified. Yet the enduring purposefulness and power of God was demonstrated in that whilst Jesus was rejected and killed by his opponents, he still triumphed over them in his resurrection and ascension. He was not to be defeated. He showed himself to be the true Messiah of Israel, appointed and anointed by the One God, to lead people out of captivity into a fullness of life that can never be destroyed.

In his own ministry, Jesus recast Israel to be better conformed to the purposes of God. His calling of twelve disciples to be his close followers, as apostles, recalled the formation of Israel as twelve tribes. They were called to know, enjoy and participate in the expression of God's covenant purposefulness, declaring and exhibiting God's redemptive power. Jesus gave attention to this and the way his disciples related together. Love. This was the basis for everything. This was picked up and stressed by the Apostle John in his writings; and in the emphasis placed on disciples' identity, as an expression of Israel's true vocation, by the Apostle Peter. These exhortations highlight that Jesus called people to function as persons in plurality, absorbing and expressing God's love, worshipping the One God and walking in His ways.

What we see in all of this is the vital importance of relationships and relationality. Jesus shows care towards people; but his eye was also towards how people behave together, as persons in plurality. It was in the dynamics of her plurality that Israel was called to exhibit the character, the glory and goodness, of the One God. The organic expression of this plurality among the disciples of Jesus, in the relationships and practices found within church, is to be a visage, an introduction to the very mystery of the One God whom we have been called to worship.

It is through grasping this emphasis upon representation and replication of mankind as the Image and Likeness of God that we can better understand the emphasis that Jesus makes in a final address to his apostles, when with them in Galilee. In what is known as the Great Commission, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, “Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (**Matthew 28.18-20**). The one command that is here present in the Greek text is found in a verb, an imperative, addressed to the whole group: *mathetteusate* - ‘make disciples!’. Literally, the text reads, ‘As you travel, make disciples of all nations’. As discipleship was being expressed and brought to maturity in the humanity of Jesus Christ himself, the commission given to the disciples, as a group, was that they in turn should make disciples of others; and that this process should be brought to expression among all the nations of the world. This was Israel’s mission. The mission was integral to Israel’s identity.

Herein is found a partial answer, in addressing the conundrum of ‘the chicken and the egg’. Jesus relentlessly focussed on carrying the proclamation and expression of the Kingdom of God throughout the land of Israel. At the same time, he looked to teach and train a cadre of disciples, a group together tutored in the words, works and ways of the Kingdom of God. Mission mattered. But mission was not to be separated from the pursuit of discipleship. Relationships matter. Discipleship manifested in and through just and righteous relationships, grounded in the characteristic of God’s love, lies at the heart of mission.

When we come to look at the disciples after Jesus’ ascension, in the Book of Acts, we see this pattern, prioritising relationality and plurality, repeated again. Indeed, there appeared to be no urgency in looking to go out from Jerusalem into all Judea and beyond. Prior to the persecution of Christians that broke out in Jerusalem, recorded in **Acts 8**, we see that the nascent church was focussed on manifesting the presence and power of God working in, among and through them. It was in and through their relationship, with God manifesting His Kingdom presence and power among them, that they established a basis for evangelising, proclaiming the Resurrection and present reality of Jesus Christ. The scattering of believers out from Jerusalem, into Judea and beyond, did not change this emphasis. Relationships matter, for it is in the gathering of people together in Jesus’ name that the One God expresses His presence among us.

Christendom

What did adjust things was the advent of Christendom, under the rule of the Emperor Constantine, in the fourth century after Christ. From being an often persecuted minority, the rapid growth of Christianity in the first through third centuries led to a critical change, which some have interpreted as a tragedy, others a great opportunity. From being a heterogeneous organism, a plurality of Christ-centred persons experiencing faith in a variety of ways, Christianity became a structured, official religion of Empire. From church existing as a complex organism, a plurality of persons *experiencing* faith, church was pressured towards becoming a homogenous organisation that served the purposes of Empire, *professing* a uniform faith. Conformity now mattered. First, under Constantine, across the whole of his Empire. Then, following the divide between the Roman and Byzantine domains of Empire, there came schism in the church, producing a Latin speaking Catholic church, centred on Rome, in the West; and a Greek speaking Orthodox church, orientated around Constantinople, in the East. Especially in the West, however, political power and religious expression became inextricably interwoven in a way that would go on to dominate the expression of faith and Christian discipleship within the church until the European Reformation.

The Reformation, as we earlier noted, did not greatly change the dynamic of institutionalised church. The Lutheran and Reformed expressions of Protestant faith, mushrooming across northern Europe, were allied to political interests that demanded independence from a declining, Holy Roman Empire. Yet the expressions of church, within these Protestant traditions, did not vary significantly from their Roman Catholic counterparts. They all continued as Christendom churches. They identified with local areas, or parishes. They looked to civic powers to support and ally with them. And their churches were centred upon buildings rather than identified as the people who might gather within them. They used the language of 'means of grace' and 'ordinances of religion' to explain and promote ministries and roles in society. And they required conformity rather than engagement in liberating mission.

There were few exceptions in promulgating this pattern within the realms of a Catholic church, in both its Roman and Protestant expressions, that dominated Western, European Christianity through to the eighteenth century. We see little of what we would identify today as mission. There was no concept, let alone talk, of *missio Dei*, the 'mission of God'. There was only the practice of the *missio ecclesiae*, the mission of the church, often expressed through persecution of

deviance or subjection of peoples and even nations by military conquest in the name of Christendom. Mission was often inextricably interwoven with the expansion and promulgation of European national and commercial interests, even through to the twentieth century. Indeed, it was only in the years following the First World War that we begin to find mention and expression of a mindset that embraced mission as *missio Dei*. This new mindset might well have come to affect the way Christian witness and evangelism is spoken of and engaged in by many Christian disciples today. It came, however, too late in the game to change encultured mindsets and attitudes to church among many within the nations among whom we now live.

This brief recollection should make us wary, in the twenty-first century, as to how we might go about identifying what is essential to the nature of church. We live with encultured habits, traditions, preferences and prejudices regarding the manner in which we give expression to faith. These are deeply rooted, going back centuries and some for even more than a millennium. Does their historicity make them, of necessity, essential?

What structures and ways of doing things need to remain the way they are? What needs to be discarded or changed, where we aspire to express an authentically Biblical way of experiencing faith in Jesus Christ, through participating in his life, ministry and victory?

What doctrines and creeds, all of which were carved out within the context of the peculiar political and social pressures of their time, need to be held and adhered to; and which need to be relegated to history, allowing us to reformulate how we might help others to experience faith today?

What type of leadership and ministry is appropriate to a church where only the Lord Jesus Christ is the sole authority? Where every disciple can search the Holy Scriptures and hear, in a manner that resonates with the Bible's authoritative testimony, the voice of God speaking to us today.

These are the questions that are before us, as we turn to explore what it is we need to consider renouncing, that we can truly be a kenotic people who are fitted for mission, readied for anastatic empowerment. We have rehearsed something of what we need to recall. Now we go on to ask, 'What is it that we need to renounce?'

Chapter 23

Renouncing for mission

It sounds disingenuous. Renouncing for mission? Far too negative. Isn't mission meant to be all about vision, enthusiasm, positivity? Herein lies a challenge to prevalent attitudes towards mission. For renouncing is vital in order to engage in effective mission.

The ways of God and the ways of mankind are meant to blend together, as we know from the Adam narrative in the early parts of the Book of Genesis. The recorded story of an emerging people, being formed into Israel, chosen by God for the manifestation of His love, glory and goodness, tells another story. A story of a people who were distracted and diverted from the path that God intended for them, until the appearance of the Messiah. The coming of a king who called disciples to participate in his life, ministry and victory. A king who did not advance in military force against the nations but triumphed through other means. A king who emptied himself, becoming a servant. Who humbled himself, in obedience. Who fulfilled, in and through his life, the calling and commission that God gave to mankind. In Jesus Christ, the *missio Dei* and the *missio hominum* – the Mission of God and the Mission of Mankind – converge and are fulfilled together. Mankind finds definition, meaning and fulfilment when drawn into participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. In order to engage in mission, we need to go on to embrace, as Jesus Christ did, the second of our focus points: Renounce.

It is tempting and not uncommon when addressing the challenge of mission to begin by formulating strategies and programmes for communicating the Gospel, carefully crafted to be socially relevant and targeted at a defined age-range or cultural grouping of people. To shape a presentation of the Gospel in order to appeal to the perceived, felt needs of people. Present the product. Make the invitation. Seal the deal. The trouble is, Jesus didn't operate that way. For him the Gospel was to be found in neither a presentation nor a product. He is the Gospel. The Gospel of the Kingdom was enacted through his life on Earth, as Jesus of Nazareth. He, the One God come among us in a fully human form, is the Gospel. And we, in our humanity, are called to be grafted into his humanity. His words, works and ways. His life, ministry and victory. The Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The One God who meets with us, through the dynamic living of Jesus Christ, is also the One God revealed in the Old Testament. It is no coincidence that God chose to reveal Himself to Moses saying, 'I will be who I will be'. The One God chose to express His identity in verbal terms, again later declaring Himself in Sinai to be, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (**Exodus 34.6-7**). As those called to and caught up into participation in the Mission of God, through Jesus Christ, we are called to inhabit and express the character that God reveals through Jesus Christ. To be caught up in the dynamic of his life. We have to learn to become the Gospel, that we might share the Gospel. There is no alternative.

This Gospel is not a proposition or a package. This revelation of God in Jesus Christ has to be recalled by us, again and again. We need to renounce an enduring propensity to make the Gospel into a proposal. It is not something we can invite people merely to subscribe to, through acknowledging its truth. The Gospel is a life that we are to inhabit and that we invite others to enter with us. The Gospel is Jesus Christ. And we are to become expressions of the Gospel, experiencing faith in Jesus Christ.

For this reason, our investigation of mission today must begin with an act of Recall. We look to the Holy Scriptures, back to the life that mankind was designed for, that Israel was called to enact and that Jesus Christ alone fulfilled. We have recalled how the first Christians understood and proclaimed this message, one that invites people to come to know Jesus Christ, dying to self and rising by the power of his Resurrection into a new life, where Jesus Christ is our Lord and Master. The Gospel presents people with an invitation to a lifestyle. It invites us to embrace a purpose, conform to a pattern and be filled with a power that is of the One God, expressed *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit. It is in looking to engage in a journey that pursues this path that we address the question of what we should renounce, in order to be effective in mission.

In the preceding chapter, we concluded by raising questions with regard to the type of structure, doctrine and leadership that is needed to be effective in mission. We address these now, concluding our exploration in our final chapter.

Structure

Jesus Christ redefines the type of structure that matters, in leading people into experiencing faith. He showed that the structure that is needed is one that expresses our humanity, in the words that we speak, the works that we engage in and the way that we live. The building of character and the expression of virtues that reflect the character of the One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – expressed among a plurality of people, is the one structure that is foundational to mission.

Certainly, there can be a usefulness in having ancillary structures; but that utility is dependent upon those ancillary structures aiding the dynamic expression of faith. This comes about through persons in plurality being inhabited by the presence of the One God. In this regard, the Tabernacle during the wilderness wanderings of Israel and the Temple in Jerusalem fulfilled an ancillary function: they served as point of focus and as a meeting place for God's people, whereby they could consciously draw near to and enter God's presence. They were not, however, structures that proved permanent. What mattered was that they served a purpose. When that purpose was no longer effectively served by them, then their usefulness ended and they were allowed, by God, to be lost and destroyed.

For this reason, we need to be careful about holding too closely to structures, other than the structure of interpersonal relationships. Physical structures, edifices of stone that we have built and named as church, can make us forgetful that church can only be those persons in plurality that make use of these buildings. We need to renounce any prioritising of the care and maintenance of buildings over against investing in the care and maintenance of people.

And edifices can be made of other materials. Where Christendom turned church into an event, featuring performative acts of preaching and sacramental celebration, it became possible to lose sight of a building made up of people. A performance does not necessitate relationships being cultivated and developed among congregants. Unwittingly, we have allowed church to become for many an event that people attend, rather than an organism within which they understand themselves to be functioning parts.

Likewise, we need to renounce any tribalism that places our loyalty to a tradition or an organisation over a prior loyalty to Jesus Christ and the pursuit of

participation in his life, ministry and victory. Church buildings come and go. Denominations and their traditions come and go. Organisational structures are born within historical contexts and in cultures peculiar to their time. The circumstances that led to their birth will inevitably change as context and culture change. There is a place to remember with thankfulness what has been done in the past and to celebrate what has been accomplished in and through the ministries of our forefathers. And then to start again. To bring together the essentials of what really matters and give expression to them in a new way.

In our day, this means that we need to be prepared to look at our resources and the tools we use in a radical light. Do our church buildings serve our purpose, as we seek to conform to Jesus Christ and his ways? What, if any, in our ways of gathering in space and place or component parts to our worship services enhance our interpersonal relationality and experience of faith in God? As travellers who have no place of permanency in this world, we need to assess every asset, every style of meeting and every tradition that is dearly held by us in the light of its utility in the worship of the One God. We need to focus on experiencing a faith that leads to a synchronisation of our lives with the mission that flows from the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit.

Doctrine

Jesus Christ is the Gospel. He brings the Kingdom of God to Earth and releases it into our lives. His mission while he was physically present on Earth culminated in going to the Cross in order to redeem us and bring us back to God. The triumph of his expressing and releasing God's mercy into our lives, through his sacrificial death, is proven through his bodily resurrection and ascension into the Heavens. This is essential doctrine.

We have to be careful not to usurp the priority of the Biblical witness, expressed in the sixty-six books of the Bible, with short-hand summaries and formulaic doctrines. These often arose to punctuate periods in the social, economic and political history of the church, as church sought to find a way of expressing her identity – her convictions and practices – within the context and culture of different people groups and nations. Doctrines carved out in the fourth and fifth centuries, within the political intrigues of the Roman Empire, may no longer be helpful or relevant when seeking to work out what it means to experience faith in the One God, in the global context of the twenty-first century. The same

applies to doctrines reformulated during the turbulent changes in the balance of power within Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Our loyalty must not be to the formulations of men and women who sought to be faithful to the One God in their way, appropriate to their context and culture, in the past. We need to renounce any tendency to live life now as if we were living in past centuries. Instead, we need to come afresh to the authoritative basis for experiencing faith that is given to us in the Holy Scriptures, in order to submit ourselves, as persons in plurality together, to the sole authority of Jesus Christ. In the light of Christ and with the illumination of Holy Scripture, we need to give fresh expression to convictions and practices that are true to the revelation of God's will, to be enacted in our lives.

The doctrines that we hold to and the creeds and confessions that we make use of need to be relevant and useful in seeking to live out our mission. They need to aid us in inviting others to join with us, in expressing what it means to be people experiencing faith in Jesus Christ. Good doctrine will lead to effective advance of the Kingdom of God. We need to renounce and resist any insistence to retain doctrines, creeds or confessions that no longer serve the purposes of Kingdom advance today.

Leadership

Where we seek to move forward, leadership will always be a contested area. It is now a far cry from the days when nations declared the Divine Right of Kings. When governance through feudal systems enforced conformity to the whim of a ruler. Democracy is accepted by many as the political norm. So what does leadership now mean and what should it look like in the church, as we seek to pursue mission?

It should not mean that the pastor is in charge. Nor should it look like the elders', deacons' or members' meeting is in charge. Too often we look for a leader other than Jesus Christ alone. Significantly, Jesus Christ never referred to himself as a leader. He preferred speaking about being a servant. Likewise, the Apostle Paul, in all his writings, never referred to himself as a leader. Nor did he refer to anyone else as a leader. He preferred to style himself as a slave, voluntarily captive to Christ. Herein may lie a clue in seeking to understand the nature of leadership for us today. We need people engaged in leading who self identify as servants. A.K.A. Christians.

Good leadership, in the Bible, is always inspirational leadership. It's something that a person enacts, rather than a status that they hold. As soon as a man or a woman seeks to assert status or the right to rule in a Christian context, they have probably already lost the right to do so. Real leadership really inspires. It does not seek to intimidate or dominate.

We have to renounce the notion that any church needs to recruit a particular man or a woman to be their leader. No church needs a leader other than the One God, who reaches out to us *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit. So why do Christians sometimes speak of needing someone to lead their church? My observation is that this desire often arises out of a failure in discipleship being modelled and taught. Where there is a disinclination to take responsibility or there is a preference to follow the leading of a man or woman, it is likely that we are looking away from Jesus. We might want someone else to take responsibility for mission. Someone else to blame, when inevitable fractures and failings start to show. This can't be done. Each one of us is called to account. Jesus is the leader. We are his servants.

Longing for a leader, other than Jesus Christ, is something that has to be renounced and repented of within church. We should not look to a man or woman, nor to a group of men or women, to tell us what we must do. Rather, we need to look to the One God, to the example and teaching found in the words, works and ways of Jesus Christ and to that which is imparted to us, by the Gift of the Holy Spirit. This is not to say that we should abandon the need for leadership to be exercised. We should, however, ask God to raise up among us those who will truly model leadership, through inspiring us to look to the way of self-emptying and servanthood, humility and obedience to God. It is this type of leadership that the church needs more than any other. We need to renounce and repent of false leadership, which so often disables churches, in pursuing patterns that have fostered an emphasis on office and authority. We need models of leadership that will inspire us towards being refuelled for effective mission. Self emptying. Serving. Humble. Obedient. Jesus.

Chapter 24

Refuelling for Mission

Effective mission occurs when the effusive presence and power of the One God is released from among His people. Men, women and children are refuelled for mission when caught up in the dynamic expression of the love of the Father, mediated through His Son who became a man in Jesus Christ, flowing into and filling our lives by the purposeful presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

For effective mission, we need a renewed experience of God's presence; and when that is absent, we need to hope, long and pray for more of it. Experiencing faith matters. Sometimes we have to acknowledge that we are not in control; and that means avoiding the temptation of constructing theologies that explain why nothing is happening. We need to give each other permission to acknowledge when we are not experiencing faith, in order that we might look to effective means in having our faith reignited. We long for what we hope for. Let's long for what the One God would give us, in Jesus' name.

It is not easy to be spiritually and emotionally naked and exposed. To tarry in prayer, expressing our longing for God. To this place of vulnerability, acknowledging the vacuum within us, we must come again and again. Calling out and waiting for a fresh visitation of the Holy Spirit, who would shape our lives more fully into the mould that is the humanity of Jesus Christ. This has proven to be key in igniting the flame of effective mission and discipleship development throughout the history of the church. It is no less the case today. Questions of culture and context are secondary to this. Discussions over how we should better structure church and communicate to others, form our statements of faith and release a new generation of leadership are important; but they are meaningless, unless there is a wind that comes from God to fill us, purify us and empower us. Refuel can only take place when we begin with prayer. Lots of it.

With that provision clearly stated, we can proceed to look at what it might mean to be refuelled for mission, in bringing an anastatic focus to our structures, doctrines and patterns of leadership.

Structure

For centuries, we have received and benefitted from the preached Word. The revelation of God, made known in the Holy Scriptures, expounded and applied from the pulpit and the lectern. Preaching and teaching. One and the same. Or are they?

Undoubtedly, good preaching is a valuable, performative act. It requires oratory as well as expository skills. And the unction of the Holy Spirit. Where the preacher is attentive to the Holy Spirit, sensing and relating the revelation that comes in the Bible to the lives of listeners, preaching can be greatly edifying and also educational. Now a-days, however, educational theory informs us that we can know teaching happens when we can establish whether someone has learnt something. It requires interaction and feedback. Today, preaching and teaching are different media in communicating. They involve different skills and methods. We need to recognise and embrace this reality.

In a church context, where we are seeking not only to inform but to cultivate discipleship, we need teaching. A model of apprenticeship is probably an appropriate one to pursue. Monkey watch. Monkey do. There are rich resources, in terms of knowledge and experience among God's people, when it comes to living and outworking the Christian life, within every church community. These need to be mined and utilised in the development of disciples. There is a place for preaching. There is also a place for teaching and coaching apprentices.

Relationality, at the heart of every church, has to be enhanced. Relationships that develop convictions and share practices that are lived out and practised in community, not simply talked about. There has to be space and a place for experimentation. We have to allow for occasions of failure as well as success. Fatigue as well as energy. Rhythms of rest and relaxation, as well as productivity.

The day when one person, a pastor, might be assigned sole responsibility for the cure of souls and the encouragement of the saints needs to be consigned to history. Pastors are to be valued; but not as the sole minister within church. We are now in a season where we require facilitators and coaches within church. Relationality matters. Relationality that embraces all and seeks to enable and engage all. We were created by God to be persons in plurality. The Spirit of God would breathe into us, with anastatic empowerment, to enable us to combat

the forces that would trap us in ghettos of isolation and fragment precious bonds of caring love.

The One God makes Himself known through relationships that express lovingkindness. Jesus modelled this. The apostles taught it. Every generation needs to embrace it afresh. Lovingkindness that is to characterise relationships among the plurality of persons that constitute church. Where there is conflict, a path to reconciliation needs to be pursued. Where there is harm done, both sorrow and forgiveness need to be expressed. This is the type of structure that precedes all others that we might seek to utilise, in the development of church. The structure that the Spirit of God grants anastatic empowerment to is one of a body made up of flesh and blood, with scarred hands and a pierced side.

Doctrine

Good doctrine helps us better see, recognise and come to participate in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Good doctrine will always bring us to look into the eyes of Jesus, recognising there the presence of our Father and the promise of the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Good doctrine draws us into experiencing the anastatic embrace of the One God, an enfolding love that is *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's anastatic empowerment may be read about in books; but it is owned and given expression when the Gift manifests in our lives, releasing giftings and ministries that empower church together. Of course it is possible for people to experience faith in isolation, when there is no alternative. It is unlikely, however, that a person who experiences faith that participates in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ will remain in isolation for long. Experiencing faith is infectious. It is likely to be contagious.

There are many different creeds, confessions and statements of faith that have been written over the centuries. Are they all relevant for today and consistent with one another? That is unlikely. Because all Holy Scripture is God-breathed, we need to find courage to take the Bible more seriously as our primary resource. We need to recognise how it draws us into the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ, discovering fresh truths and gaining new insights throughout the journey we are engaged upon.

Reading the Bible is exploring a journey together. We need to apply ourselves to doing this together. There is a narrative that we are called to enter into that

involves our engagement together, in seeking after the will of our Heavenly Father, looking to how we might better be conformed to the way of the Son, empowered and enabled by the infilling of the Holy Spirit in anastatic power. The Holy Spirit will never leave us discarded and lost. He will always come in order to help us and teach us, as we share together, looking for His manifestations expressed through the ministries that he develops in our midst.

Leadership

Leadership, enabled by the Holy Spirit, will find different ways of expression in different cultures and contexts. In the period following Jesus' ascension, the role of the apostles in prayer and in giving themselves to God's Word quickly needed to be supplemented by those who tended to the material needs of the church in Jerusalem. Much early church appears to have replicated the synagogue pattern of having ruling elders who were the heads of families. We do not, however, see a homogenous pattern develop. The Holy Spirit enabled peripatetic apostles, teachers and prophets as well as evangelists. Yet these were not always perceived or received as leaders. We have seen that apostolic leadership, in the early church, took as its model the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Leadership that was framed by both servanthood and suffering for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

There is a need, today, to look afresh to the Holy Spirit, asking Him to form among us patterns of leadership that are modelled on Jesus Christ alone. Those who lead need to have a vision of the Kingdom and express a commitment, through their own convictions and practices, to pursuing the way of the Kingdom. In this regard, leadership should not be 'top down'. The emergence of a growing number of churches, especially within Asia, associated with Disciple Making Movements, evidences the fact that a group of people reading the Bible and looking to live under the authority of Jesus Christ alone can grow, prosper and multiply to great effect.

We need people in leadership who are intent, above all else, in pursuing a life of participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. Formal, theological training may bring advantage. Counselling skills and training to work among those who are marginalised or suffering from pathologies will help. But what matters the most is a commitment to live under the authority of Jesus Christ, pursuing his words, works and ways, as born witness to and testified to in the Bible. Seeking to be examples among those who pursue the way of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The underlying thesis of this book has been that any shortcomings of church today, in the pursuit of mission and ministry, arise out of a failure to engage with and apply the essential narrative of Biblical revelation: a call to participation in the life, ministry and victory of Jesus Christ. This core message has to be recalled. Inadequate renderings of the Gospel message need to be renounced. A theological reconstruction and application of the Gospel, made in the light of Biblical narrative, has to be freshly undertaken.

A renewed focus on the core narrative of the Bible, leading us to renounce encultured preconceptions of what church should look like and what it means to have faith in Jesus Christ, will not leave us impotent. Addressing our failure is the challenge that faces us today. A call to focus on Recall, Renounce and Refuel is no less than an invitation to reconstruct our basic understanding of what it means to experience faith. A reconstructed understanding could lead to a re-envisioned social imagination, birthing a fresh vitality and effectiveness in our worship, life and service as Christian disciples.

Parts of what has been rehearsed in this book may have excited you. Parts may have appalled you. Either way, my prayer is that it may serve in helping you, both as a person and as part of a plurality of persons, to embrace the possibility that God can do more in you and that we, as Jesus' disciples, can do better in this world. Be blessed in your looking to the words, the works and the ways of Jesus. May an enhanced experience of faith lead you to being refuelled to the glory of the One God, to be more fulfilled as a person and more effective in worship and living out the life, as a human being, that has been entrusted to you.

Postscript

All theology is contextual. It arises from a community and it is addressed to a community. Sometimes it may appear to be entirely the work of a thoughtful individual, but there is no theologian who has not been formed by a context through a web of relationships. Everyone who speaks and writes about the ways of God has a home and an audience.

The importance of *Experiencing Faith* is not only that it offers a succinct, biblical and original framework for Christian discipleship in a clear and persuasive manner. It certainly does this, and in so doing reflects both the mind and the heart of the writer. I can say this with confidence because I have worked closely with Jim Purves for the last five years as a colleague on the staff team of the Baptist Union of Scotland. Yet the importance of this work surpasses the skill of the solo theologian. *Experiencing Faith* arises from a context and is written to a context; it has a home and an audience.

The home is the family of churches and scholars that Jim has belonged to since his conversion to Christ as a student. Much could be said about the wisdom that has been collected in a spiritual journey beginning in the Church of Scotland, moving through the charismatic new church movement and into the Baptist Union of Scotland, interacting with many other fellowships and scholars from across Europe and beyond on the way.

However, my interest in this chapter is more in the audience than the home. *Experiencing Faith* is written in and for a context. Whilst believers of all traditions will find riches within it, the primary audience is the Baptist community in Scotland. Jim writes as a committed participant in this community, from the unique vantage point of the Mission and Ministry Advisor.

For this reason it is of particular importance that the intended audience hears and responds to what Jim is saying. This is a book that boldly proposes a 'more effective pattern of Christian discipleship' (3). How does this land within our context? Every reader will reach their own conclusion about this, but I am grateful for the opportunity as the General Director of the Baptist Union of Scotland, and in some sense therefore as a representative of this network of churches, to offer my impression of how *Experiencing Faith* connects with what God is saying to our churches and doing in our churches at this time.

In what follows I am not offering a critique of the book but rather making some connections between its themes and the context of its primary audience. I will be focusing on three areas: a three-fold pattern for discipleship, the irradiation of the Holy Spirit and the shaping of the local church.

A three-fold pattern for discipleship

‘We need to focus on discipleship’ is a common cry just now. There is a widespread feeling that practising the Christian life, and in particular teaching others *how to* practise the Christian life, is an area in which churches are weak. An older generation, who are now the majority in most local churches, look back to their own Christian nurture through Sunday school, perhaps helped by Girls or Boys Brigade, Christian Endeavour, Scripture Union and attending worship twice on a Sunday. Whilst much personal godly living was discovered and imbibed through these experiences, it does not appear to have created generations of disciple-making disciples. In recent decades we have tended to equate disciple-making, even discipleship itself, with various courses and programmes. Again much good has come from these, but on the whole they have focused on acquiring knowledge or perspectives rather than framing and empowering a life of Spirit-filled obedience.

Recall→renounce→refuel is a simple alliterative framework for describing and practising the way of Jesus. It is a kind of heuristic or rule-of-thumb to remind us what is truly important in the way of Jesus. The concepts are thoroughly rooted in the gospels and in scripture more widely. One of the strengths of *Experiencing Faith* is that it does not try to squeeze the New Testament into the mould of this framework but rather demonstrates that there are traces of it (some stronger, others weaker) throughout the gospels and letters.

This biblical framework has potential to form the basis of a discipleship journey that a community embraces together. A communal life could be built around these three practices; they are in essence a rule of life. They lend themselves to guiding communal and personal living, and to inspiring prayer and worship.

Furthermore, for anyone who is intentionally practising recall→renounce→refuel, they become a simple explanation of the Christian way. This matters greatly at time when most people who are interested in Christianity (and there are many) are more likely to ask, ‘what do you *do*’ than ‘what do you *believe*?’ This is not to say that belief and its content are

unimportant, but rather to notice that many unbelievers intrinsically understand the principle that ‘faith without works is dead’. We are foolish to underestimate the evangelistic power of an easy-to-explain code for living.

This connects with another recurrent theme in *Experiencing Faith*, that Christianity is inherently practices and not simply propositions:

This Gospel is not a proposition or a package. This revelation of God in Jesus Christ has to be recalled by us, again and again. We need to renounce an enduring propensity to make the Gospel into a proposal. (151)

We are a network of churches that places great emphasis on the teaching of scripture, especially through the medium of preaching. This leaves us persistently at risk of teaching doctrine as an end in itself, as though the essence of Christianity is knowing ideas about God rather than living faithfully in a renewed relationship with God. The central truths of the Gospel arise from actions - the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – and give rise to actions that are our humble and grateful response to the grace of God in Christ. Preaching that delights in doctrine but has no passionate call to respond to God’s love and mercy by living in a distinctive way, or whose application lacks the imagination to get beyond a general exhortation to pray more and sin less, lacks the power to make new disciples of the lost or mature disciples of the found.

The recall→renounce→refuel code invites us to watch out for these core responses in all our teaching. It invites us to reflect on our living and tell stories of the outworking of these three R’s. One of the interesting discoveries many churches have made about digital worship during the lockdown of 2020 has been the scope for involving many people in worship, sharing their own stories of living with God in these days. Whether it has been short clips filmed on the phone or sometimes faltering sharing in Zoom worship or prayer gatherings, the power of hearing one another’s lived spiritual experience has been undeniable. We have much more to learn about building one another up through multi-voiced sharing of growth and vulnerability. Recall→renounce→refuel offers us a valuable framework for learning to do this.

The Irradiation of the Holy Spirit

We have been living through an age where managerialism is highly valued. Organisations are applauded for the succinctness of their mission statements, the determination with which they pursue excellence and the leanness of their structures. When this is linked to metrics which demonstrate growth in size, scope and income, success seems undeniable. In some respects this thinking has helped churches organise ourselves to pursue the call of Christ together, but it can also deceive us into believing that a well-run church is an end in itself. We can imagine that if we keep the show on the road with skill and efficiency, if our worship is well-crafted and if the congregation is content (or indeed growing, albeit mainly by transfer), then we are accomplishing the will of God.

Experiencing Faith challenges this. It warns against 'church as a form of religious theatre' (92) and urges us to pursue the 'affective experience of God, through attentiveness to the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives expressed through our non-cognitive senses' (72). This is a timely invitation to ensure our central focus is on the experience of God – to be communities that cherish knowing God rather than simply knowing *about* God. The structures of our churches are not the reality of our churches. They are the wineskins into which the new wine of God's Spirit is poured. Without a central compelling desire for the experience of God in our lives and in our midst, we are like a wine-lover who keeps a cellar full of beautiful, but empty, bottles.

I am the kind of person who naturally tends towards a well-organised and highly controlled environment. This has often over the years affected my approach to church leadership and would to some extent characterise many churches in our Scottish Baptist network. An attentiveness to the work of the Holy Spirit and an openness to the affective experience of God does not sit comfortably with a culture of high control. The overflow of God's Spirit can be quickly quenched by an undue concern to uphold our customary ways of doing things. Yet *Experiencing Faith* reminds us that transformation occurs when believers are 'exposed to that intensified irradiation of God's holiness that comes by the Holy Spirit' (43). This of course may occur as word and Spirit combine to empower a well-prepared sermon, but it may as readily occur through opportunities to seek prayer from one another or to tell part of our unique journey of faith as part of a worship gathering. It may happen in the midst of a carefully rehearsed set of worship songs, or as readily in the space between the songs, if we dare to allow one, when the Spirit stirs a response in our souls.

Because Scottish Baptist churches are profoundly biblical churches, placing the reading and preaching of scripture at the heart of our common life, we can confidently make a turn to the experiential and affective nature of discipleship without undue fear of losing our scriptural anchorage and drifting into naïve subjectivism. Because our roots are deep in scripture, I believe we are well-placed to intensify our focus on the experiential content of discipleship and define our life in Christ not only as holding a set of convictions but pursuing distinctive Christ-like practices that arise from convictions.

The Shaping of the Local Church

I am convinced that the future of the church in Scotland will include congregations in many new shapes and forms. *Experiencing Faith* makes some observations about this and I want to say more in this area.

Those of us who have enjoyed our inherited style of church for decades, and I include myself in this, can readily enumerate the benefits we have received from this: they will surely include systematic and often challenging Bible teaching, uplifting worship, loving pastoral care, and the opportunity to take part in ministries and projects for the sake of the good news. These are undoubtedly good things and in many ways have served us as ‘insiders’ (predominantly from a middle-class culture) well.

However, there are now a number of reasons to question whether our existing model of church is sufficient alone for the mission of God in these days.

1. For 30 years or so Scottish Baptist churches have been declining by about 1% annually. We can console ourselves with the fact that other families of churches are declining at a higher rate, but this is hardly evidence of our success. In fact, we would certainly be declining at a faster rate if we were not maintaining our numbers thanks to a significant volume of transfers from churches in greater decline. I’m confident that the problem is not with the truth of the message of Jesus; it remains the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. This leads me to conclude that we need to ask some serious questions about how we, who are called to be witnesses of Jesus, embody that message in our common life. Could the way we ‘do’ church be part of the problem?

2. Our dominant teaching method involves an extended talk by one person. There are many in our network who do this with great skill, and all who speak in churches put considerable time and effort into preparation. However, we know from mountains of research that successful learning arises from participation and engagement, through speaking as well as listening. Learning for life is typically social rather than solitary. I believe it is time for us to consider how we make learning the way of Jesus a participatory experience – more relational, more engaging, more respectful of what everyone brings and more enjoyable. Those of us who love to preach need to reskill ourselves to create experiences of learning and facilitate discovery. As *Experiencing Faith* argues, those recognised as having some expertise in theology ‘may helpfully serve as coaches, seeking to assist in guiding fellow disciples...’ (88). It might just be that we find a new freedom to invite people into a learning space that is not based on a hierarchical expert-amateur model but is predicated on the idea of a community journeying with God and learning together along the way.
3. This leads to another issue which I describe as our ‘high-maintenance model’ of church. We assume that a normal church has at least one full-time pastor and probably owns a building. These have also typically been the benchmarks of a successful church-plant. To maintain the high standard of performative worship events, we usually have numerous rotas, which keep a small army of people busy ensuring the premises, the welcome, the music, the children’s programme, the technical presentation, the prayer ministry, the refreshments and much more are all in place. This inevitably requires us to have regular appeals for helpers. We find ourselves considering that newcomers have become fully committed to the church once they are installed in some rotas. All of this is of course entirely well-meaning and seeking to honour Christ, but surely it’s time to ask ourselves: is it really that complicated to be the church? Have we over-specified the organisational requirements? Do we (unintentionally) give a message that discipleship is keeping the church juggernaut on the road rather than living faithfully for Jesus in the whole of life?
4. High maintenance church is also high-cost church. Churches faithfully and generously support ministers with the reference stipend or more. The upkeep of buildings is a significant cost along with the many other costs

of running programmes for a large group of people. Like many others, I have spent years in a local church encouraging members to tithe to the local church; and their immense generosity enabled our high-maintenance church to function well and make gifts to other ministries and charities. However, we must face two realities. Firstly, churches cannot assume we will have the same financial base in the coming years. Numbers are declining and so therefore is giving; we know that the current younger generation are the first in decades to expect to be less well-off than their parents' generation; and no one knows how long the post-Coronavirus recession will last. Secondly, a growing sense of the kingdom call to justice within our churches, along with a stronger focus on charitable giving in wider society, must make us ask whether it is right to expect the lion's share of a believer's giving to be designated for the running of the church rather than given to the poor.

5. A further issue that arises when churches appoint paid ministers is the complexity of expectations. Many ministers find the provision of a stipend and other benefits from a church leads them to live with an obligation to make the care of the internal life of the church their top priority. Providing pastoral care for members, leading worship, preparing to preach and carrying numerous other programme responsibilities more than fills their time. These tasks are undoubtedly fulfilled with love and with a desire to reflect the servanthood of Jesus. However, when a minister is paid it can carry with it a sense that 'I should be doing everything', which reduces the space for other members in the church to participate in leading, influence and responsibility. Furthermore, when the minister's diary is pre-filled with internal expectations from the church, the possibilities for exemplifying a missional life and demonstrating missional leadership are greatly diminished. Some churches and ministers, of course, reach a very liberating understanding of how a minister can lead in mission rather than lean into maintenance, but my observation would be that this is not a general state of affairs.

So given these serious questions, what might the future be for our network of churches? Is there a new way forward? I believe there is because God is calling us into a time of transition. I am not proposing that we close down our existing expressions of church; though I have identified some major challenges we all face. There is of course much of God that we encounter in our inherited mode

of church. However, it is time to develop many new expressions of church that do not look like what we do now. Rather than gradually develop more of the same, we need to seek God for the courage to urgently develop many new things. Very few churches will transition from a form they have cherished for decades into a different kind of church, though the drive for continuing renewal within that form will remain important. But the future church will appear as we encourage, release and trust groups of members to begin new things. New ventures can embody a new vision from the outset and pursue that without needing to compromise or delay for the sake of the needs of late adopters.

Three essential characteristics of the new generation of churches will be that they are small, participative and serving.

Small: New Testament churches began in a form that was small enough to meet in a home. Beginning a church was simple because it did not require erecting a building, writing a constitution, opening a bank account or raising funds to support a paid minister. It was fundamentally relational rather than organisational. A group of people who wanted to follow Jesus together (learning from scripture, praying, creating a space of openness to the Holy Spirit and a gathering place for others who wanted this encounter with the living God) got on and did it. Similarly today, I believe we should set out to establish many small churches where relationships are central, the style is informal and the resourcing is low-maintenance. Small gatherings nurture participants rather than spectators. They have the potential to respond to changing circumstances with flexibility and giving birth to new small churches has far fewer complications than launching a traditional church plant.

Participative: The next generation of churches will prize participation over presentation. Belonging will mean having a voice – not just a vote in a meeting but being an active co-learner in a community who are together discovering what it means to follow and honour Jesus in daily life. The 1 Corinthians 14 principle that when we come together each person brings something, will be expressed not through participation in rotas but by bringing our own experience, insight, vulnerability and wisdom into worship and learning. Those who teach will be eager not only to share their studied knowledge but also to unlock and share the understanding and discipleship experience of the community as a whole. *Experiencing Faith* wisely states, ‘We are now in a season where we require facilitators and coaches within the church’ (157).

Serving: Jesus made it plain in words and deeds that he came among us ‘as one who serves’. The church that embodies his presence in the world today must be committed to the serving God’s world. Our sense of being ‘a gathered church’ has often drifted into a view of church as a ‘safe space’ for Christians, separated from the uncomfortable world of people who do not share our faith. Serving has been expressed in two ways: i) serving one another as believers, and ii) setting up ministries where we offer important support and resource to those outside the church in a client-provider relationship. I believe the new generation of churches will witness to the healing and renewing power of God by placing service in the foreground of their identity. As well as cultivating humble service to one another, they will see the service of the community (and especially the most unnoticed) as a core dimension of their witness. They will be ready to partner with people of goodwill and not just run ‘Christian projects’, seeing their influence rub off on others as they work *with* them and not simply *for* them. Similarly these churches will celebrate and pray for all those acts of service that are part of daily life and work in a holistic view of discipleship.

A Culture of Invention and Innovation

If we offer to God only expressions of church that take a form we have known for past decades and centuries, this will not be sufficient for the vast and glorious task he has called us to in Christ Jesus – to go and make disciples everywhere. We need invention and innovation, and this requires courage: the courage to try new prototypes of church and not be afraid of failure; the courage to try again when we have failed once; the courage to trust people to experiment with forms of church that seem strange to us; the courage to hold one another accountable without trying to exercise control; the courage to release people from their current duties in the church to cultivate something new.

It would certainly be easier to give our energy to maintaining and tweaking the status quo, but God is inviting and challenging us to walk with him in new ways. There is no map for this journey but there is advice on how to travel well. One strand of that advice comes in the three-fold pattern this book has explored: recall→renounce→refuel. As we envisage God’s future for us, we will do well to *recall* the way Jesus creates a community of disciples; to *renounce* ‘complicity and satisfaction with the present order of things’ (20); and to *refuel* for the journey ahead, energised by the power of the Holy Spirit:

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:19-23)

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