**FIVE PRACTICES OF FRUITFUL CONGREGATIONS –**

 **Robert Schnase, Abingdon 2007**

**RADICAL hospitality – (31.01.16)**

Romans 15 v. 7 ‘welcome one another as Christ welcomed you’. How has Christ welcomed you? What do we learn from that model?

Matthew 20 v. 28 – ‘not to be served but to serve’ – the manifesto of the Kingdom of God. How do we / could we serve as Jesus did?

Matthew 18 v. 5 – ‘welcome a child in my name’. How do we welcome and include children?

Matthew 22 v. 8 – 9 – Do we invite everyone to the wedding banquet? What would be the implications of doing that? Note the urgency of the invitation.

Hebrews 13 v. 2 – ‘entertaining angels’ as Abraham did (Genesis 18)

Living for those who have yet to encounter Jesus - not entertaining ourselves. Invitational (intentional) not just welcoming. Radical – drastic, risk taking. What would be a visitor’s first impressions of your church. (Never speak of visitors as ‘strangers’ – would you want to be identified as ‘strange’?)

**PASSIONATE worship – (07.02.16)**

Psalm 84 v. 1 – 2 – ‘My soul longs for the courts of the Lord’.

Psalm 42 v. 1 – 4 – Do you long for the Lord?

Exodus 8 v.1 – set free to worship. Moses’ demand. Many today are prevented by persecution from openly worshipping. Remembering them will help us appreciate our privilege of freedom to worship and witness. How would your faith stand up if you did not have this freedom?

Luke 10 v. 27 – ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength’ – Jesus’ summary of God’s requirements. How does worship engage your heart….. your mind …. your strength …. ?

Luke 18 v. 14 – true repentance. The more you love Him the more you understand the need for his forgiveness. How is that true in your experience?

 If following Jesus is about relationship, how will you show God that you love Him?

How do we define passion? -

Emotion, expectation, excellence, engagement….

Sensory, spontaneous, surprising, sacramental, spiritual ….

Are these found in our worship and devotion?

**INTENTIONAL faith development – (14.02.15)**

Acts 2 v. 1 – 4 speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples which is the key to everything else that happens in the Book of Acts and in the life of the Christian. It results in effective proclamation, rooted in scripture and connecting with the experience of the hearers. As people repented and received Christ they had a desire to meet together to share, grow and support:

Acts 2 v. 42 devoted to the apostles teaching and fellowship (alongside inherited synagogue worship). This has been the pattern of many subsequent spiritual revivals.

Most large growing churches are collections of many small groups or cells meeting regularly for prayer, study, social action and outreach – they grow by multiplication of cells, colonies of the Kingdom.

Writing to new churches Paul encourages them to grow in faith and love:

Philippians 2 v. 5 – seeking to have the mind of Christ & 3 v. 12 – ‘pressing on’

Galatians 5 v. 22 – 23 – ‘bear fruit’

2 Timothy 2 v. 5 & 4 v. 7 – ‘run the race’

What fruitful energies do we see in our church and in our lives?

**RISK TAKING mission and service – (21.02.15)**

It is said that church is one of the safest places to be – Should that be so? What does a low risk life look like?

Mission is the way authentic church lives and grows. It is every way in which we demonstrate God’s Kingdom in His world – Such as …..?

Matthew 25 v. 40 – ‘What you did to the least of these you did to me’ – So there will be some surprises in Heaven! Words and action must go together. Compassion and Mercy is the Jesus way, as Pope Francis identifies.

James 1 v. 22 – We are challenged to be ‘Doers of the word’.

Leviticus 19 v. 18 – ‘Love your neighbour’ was part of the law but is less about rules than about relationship.

Luke 6 v. 32 – 33 – ‘Don’t just love those who love you’, take up tougher challenges and trust God to help you. What or who might those challenges be?

Psalm 82 v. 3 – Justice to the weak and orphaned

Luke 4 v. 18 – 19 – Messiah’s manifesto – proclamation, freedom, healing … (Isaiah 61 v. 1 – 2). In which ways are we working on Jesus’ radical agenda?

It’s the opposite of safe, predictable and comfortable.

**EXTRAVAGANT generosity – (28.02.15)**

Talking about money is challenging!

2 Corinthians 9 v. 11 – ‘You will be enriched by your generosity’. God does bless us when we are generous and trusting.

Genesis 14 v. 20, Exodus 35 v. 5 – Tithing is a basic guide for the people of God. We are also called to proportional and generous giving. Therefore we do not have collections and constant fund raising but offerings and love gifts. Discuss!

Malachi 3 v. 8 – 10, Amos 5 v. 21 – 26, Micah 6 v. 8 – authentic faith expressed in real life – justice, compassion, generosity.

Luke 21 v. 4 – less is more – a widow’s offering. How does this challenge and encourage you?

Matthew 25 v. 14 – 30 – buried treasure needs to be dug up and used.

Acts 2 v. 45 – ‘gave as any had need’ – Describe some recent spontaneous expressions of love and commitment.

Our giving of time, money and talents is a response to God’s gift, a sign of our love for him, our appreciation of his goodness and our commitment to his work.

Wesley’s questions to his preachers: Is there faith? Is there fire? Is there fruit?

Jesus teaching is laced with ‘go … tell … do … love … follow … welcome …’

1 Corinthians 14 v. 12 – excel in spiritual gifts – charismata – ‘gifts of God’s grace’. How is the overflow of God’s love evidenced in your life?