

'What Are You Doing, Lord?'

by Rev. Robert Griffith

In my first sermon last Sunday, which some of you heard as I shouted without a microphone because our sound system had died, I shared a couple of Bible verses which I believe are foundational for all ministry and which have guided my steps in Christian leadership for many years. The first was 1 Corinthians 12:18 where the Apostle Paul reminds us that, it is God Who has arranged the parts of the body – every one of them – just as He determined. Many preachers and Church leaders gloss over this verse like it's some vague philosophical observation – but I take this verse literally and very seriously.

The most important reason why I am standing here now has very little to do with committees or church meetings or votes or where I chose to live and minister. I am here because God very clearly and very deliberately placed me here. The same is true for each person who calls this Church their spiritual home. Yes, you may have made a decision at one point to settle here and you decide that every week by remaining here.

But in the Kingdom of heaven, in that spiritual realm where Jesus reigns as Lord and the mission of Christ is our highest priority and deepest passion – it is God Who has placed you here, just as He determined. So each one of us needs to put our trust in God and embrace the truth that we are exactly where He needs us to be – even if we don't know why – yet.

The second verse I shared last week which is foundational to my ministry and should be foundational in every Church is John 5:19. This is where Jesus said that He only did what He saw the Father doing.

That is to say, when Jesus was ministering among us, **He didn't initiate any ministry.** Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus discerned what the Father was already doing and then participated in that ministry. Jesus was more than capable of setting the agenda and coming up with a hundred great initiatives during His ministry and they would have all been God-honouring and appropriate. But He didn't do that - and, as such - Jesus gave us one of the most important keys to all successful ministry – and the foundational principle which will guide my leadership, among you and that is: **Let God be the One Who initiates all ministry.**

So, as I shared last week, one of my most important tasks as your Senior Minister will be to help us all discern what God is already doing in our midst, in our community and indeed, in our own lives. Then, the degree to which we invest our time, prayers, energy and resources into those things, will determine the growth and fruit which will come to and from Lismore Regional Mission.

So how do we know what the Father is doing in our midst, in our communities and in our own lives? We ask Him! If you were here last week you will remember the two simple, but foundational prayers I suggested we all need to be praying every day, and never stop praying: "*What are You doing Lord?*" and "*How can I be part of it?*"

I'd like us to ponder that first question just a little today. I am not going to answer it in a local context yet because this is only my second Sunday in Lismore. That will take some time and some spiritual discernment and I won't be doing that alone.

However, I believe I do have some answers on a broader scale. I believe I have discerned some of what God is doing and desires to do across our Presbytery, across the whole Uniting Church and the Body of Christ in this great nation.

God has been strategically placing certain leaders, preachers, elders, evangelists and pastoral overseers right across the Body of Christ to prepare us for another 'great awakening' of the Church and a release of the gospel of Jesus Christ across our nation. I believe God is taking us back to our roots and our primary purpose as the Body of Christ.

Any church history buffs among us will know all about 'The Great Awakening' in the early 1700's when God used people like John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield to put a fire in the hearts of His people and the Church was reinvigorated! Let me just read this one description of that wonderful time in Church history and I will let you decide if you think we might need something like this to happen again in 2017.

"First Great Awakening was an evangelical, revitalization movement that swept Protestant Europe and British America, in the 1730s and 1740s, leaving a permanent impact on American Protestantism and in turn the worldwide Church. It resulted from simple, but powerful preaching, that gave listeners a sense of deep personal revelation of their need of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The Great Awakening pulled people away from ritual, ceremony, sacramentalism and hierarchy, and made Christianity intensely personal to the average person by fostering a deep sense of spiritual conviction and redemption, and by encouraging introspection and a commitment to a new standard of personal spirituality and relationship with God and each other."

Now, I don't know about you, but that is what I signed up for! That is why I am here. So do you think God wants to bring another 'great awakening' – absolutely! What I just described is what God regards as normal Christian living! It's the way it was always meant to be. We are the ones who describe revivals and renewal movements as 'awakenings', because we were asleep in the light. But to God, this is just normal kingdom living!

When the Church that bears His name wakes up and falls in love with Jesus and each other again, everything changes! His grace, mercy and love bring transformation to people, to communities and to whole nations. When this happens, we are surprised, but it's simply the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus when He said, "I will build My church, and the gates of hell not will prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)

For too long throughout history we have been trying to build the Church in Jesus' name and have not allowed Jesus His rightful place as the Master Builder. So the 'gates of hell' have certainly prevailed against the church we have been trying to build. Our numbers are declining. Our collective age is getting higher.

Our divisions and disputes are a constant distraction from and denial of the power of the gospel we are called to preach and live. Our internal discipline and accountability is in tatters as we face a Royal Commission and have to explain how we allowed God's most vulnerable children to be exposed to evil.

In our attempts to be inclusive and tolerant and socially responsible and culturally relevant and environmentally sensitive, we have too often lost sight of the core purpose of the Church, the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ and our calling to preach the gospel and call people to embrace Christ crucified and the salvation only Christ can bring! So yes, we most certainly do need another 'great awakening' and we need it soon!

There is so much we can do in Jesus' name and the name of the Church and much of it is really great stuff and we can be a blessing to so many people. But, **if our primary purpose, our deepest passion and our reason for existing as a Church is not leading people to a personal encounter with the living Christ – then we have missed our calling; we have forgotten Christ's mission; we have denied Christ without knowing it; we have failed to give the people around us what only we can give them: Jesus Christ.**

The Apostle Paul said it better than I ever could. So let me remind you of some words which have been in our possession probably our whole lives, in the multiple copies of the Bible we have in our homes:

*“And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. **For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.**”*

I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written:

“What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”— the things God has prepared for those who love him — these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:1-16)

What an incredible passage! What a huge slap in the face to human pride, self-sufficiency and man-made religion; and what a glorious and confronting reminder that it's all about Christ and that the Holy Spirit is in charge of the Church which Jesus is building!

It doesn't matter how far off the tracks we have wandered as the Church; it doesn't matter how distracted we have been working in ministries which are meant to flow from the Gospel of Christ, not replace it; it doesn't matter how far away we feel God and His living presence is at this point in our journey – God is still on the job. Jesus is still building His Church. The Spirit of Christ is still here.

Which means, if we are really sincere when we ask, every day: “*What are you doing, Lord?*” – God will answer and He will give us the courage, the faith, the passion and the means to partner with Him as He wakes the sleeping giant and restores the priority of the gospel and the true mission of Jesus Christ, which is the only mission we have!