

# Empowered for Sharing, Gratitude and Prayer

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Date: 04 October 2020

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[ 0 : 00 ] Have you noticed when you're out and about the array of innovative and even designer masks that people are wearing? People must be paying a fortune for some of them. I'm not into mask envy but I really admire people's sense of innovation, fun, fashion and design. I've seen some really interesting mask prints you know some are covered in glitter diamante sort of things, some are got company logos on the side, some have got big smiles across the front. In Hill Road the other day I was chatting to somebody it was a bit like a Disney film I found myself conversing with a Dalmatian.

Masks do exactly what they do, they mask things. In our reading this morning there's an outbreak of honesty, there's an outbreak of honesty and openness, nothing is hidden, no masks as Peter and John converse with the establishment and share the truth of the gospel with the establishment. They face threats, they face arrest, torture, yet they spoke boldly. Nothing is hidden, nothing transparent, open and honest in all things. And this morning's theme is about us being unleashed as a people of God in gratitude, prayer and sharing. And you will know that if it's a family, if any of those elements are missing, then family life has not only diminished but there is something seriously missing when we can't pray with and for one another, when we can't show gratitude, encouragement and share openly in all that we have to offer. So the backdrop here is that Peter and John return to the followers after going through this ordeal and are relating to what has happened. When you've been through or maybe when you have faced an ordeal, struggle or concern within your setting, within your family, wherever that might be, how do you deal with it? How do you engage with it? Do you slap a mask on? Not literally, but do you pretend it's okay? Do you put it away? Do you not share it? Do you not hand it to God?

Do you not share it or let it to God? Do you need ■■■■■ minus a card or ■■■■? Do you NRWR, stop for lack of Beard nice and recursion, frankly. Everyone is returning all our answers and getting real updates and gently. You may be tempted to start writing your Christmas cards and those letters, where we tell people, what we've been open it. Last year it was full of pictures of their new luxury extension. My goodness and it was a luxury extension. How amazing their kids were doing at school. All the grade A students.

How they had been nominated for awards in the community. Oh and their new puppy. Even their new puppy had got a certificate that they put on there. I think it was for biochemistry or something but you know you get the picture. The sad thing was is that in February of this year we heard that they had separated. Behind the mask life had been on the skids for months. Their children were in bits.

[ 3 : 38 ] The cost of the new extension had almost crippled them financially and the puppy well the puppy chewed through the sofa at Christmas and had been returned to where she came from. It was tragic.

Masking the reality of life wasn't an option for the early church and it's not an option for us now. You know the early church were really good at being real about stuff and as a result they were open to the massive move of the Holy Spirit because they knew their need of God and the need of the community that God asked them to serve.

What you saw is what you get. A community living out and doing life together in the power of the Holy Spirit. Not afraid to trust in him for all things and you have this to be pretty confident in your openness don't you?

Having gone through what they go through to say now Lord consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your Holy Servant Jesus.

That's boldness. That's trust. That's openness. That's gratitude. And the result was after they prayed the place was filled with the Holy Spirit. It was shaken.

[ 5 : 03 ] They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly and that bonded them together. That brought them together as family, encouraged each other and we read that there was this new openness.

All of the believers were in one heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions were their own, but they shared everything they had. One in heart and mind.

That's such a counter-cultural message for us, isn't it, to hear today. I think it was Mike that said the other day that if the church stopped doing social work, somebody else would probably step in and do that.

As valuable as that is. But if the church stops preaching and moving in the power of the Holy Spirit, nobody else is going to do that. We've been called to be distinctive in our culture, in our time and in our place.

What have we shared recently? Just have a moment's thought about that. What have we shared recently with somebody? And then what was the cost of that sharing?

[ 6 : 25 ] Maybe even sharing the reality of our situation, like our friends in the letter. I know that there is often a resistance in church circles.

There always has been ever since I can remember to talk about finance. Oh, the church is asking for more money. I had to learn a long time ago that it's not ours.

It's all his given to us to share. And we need to be grateful and show gratitude for that. It wasn't an issue for the early church.

As we hear at the end of it, Barnabas came and just laid everything before the apostles. Where am I going with this? I guess for us as a church unleashed as a people of gratitude, prayer and sharing, then it has to be exactly that.

Gratitude, prayer and sharing. Take out the gratitude and thanks for all that God has done for us, done for me in my life on the cross through Jesus Christ and his resurrection for me and saving me.

[ 7 : 34 ] Then without that, surely that's so much to be grateful for, isn't it? We can't be in a Christian life without that gratitude moment by moment for all that God has done for us and to share that with other people.

Take out the prayer and we miss out on that power element of relationship with Jesus through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, that conversation that happens 24-7.

Take out the sharing. Take out the sharing. We become little more than a paid members club. If I don't like something, well, I'll just withdraw my giving.

I'll cancel my subscription because something or somebody upset me. That's not family. That's not the family picture I see in Acts. This was a people totally committed and sold out for his purposes and the people that they were called to serve.

One of years ago, there was a comedy program I just loved. It was called Bread. It was written by Carla Lane and it was focused around a Liverpoolian working class family.

[ 8 : 49 ] And it was filmed mostly around their kitchen table. And in the middle of this kitchen table was a chicken. It was a pottery chicken, one with a lid where you used to keep eggs in it.

But this was the pot where the family, after their various exploits, not all of them were particularly legal, where they would place their money as a central focus for their family life.

It was family. They shared everything. Everyone contributed. No one was left out. There's going to be a letter that will arrive with you soon.

If you don't get one, please ask for one. It will be coming from our wardens at the church. It's very honest and open. No masks about the element of sharing and finances at Christchurch.

Like most settings, we as a church family will be struggling to financially maintain that which God has asked of us as a family.

[ 9 : 55 ] And at this time of need in our community, we need to be aware of that, as in the early church, that it's not a time to say, oh, what can we cut back on? But rather, how much are you asking of us, Lord, to give and share with others?

I'm aware that some members of the family are really realistic in what they can give financially and put into that pot, the chicken in the middle of the table.

And others maybe haven't considered the importance and relevance of that giving in response to God and the wider church family. And that's what the letter will ask of us.

The letter will ask each and every one of us to come before God and to consider what our contribution is in the light of this teaching series and that of the early church.

As I said at the end of this reading this morning, we are picturing Barnabas. Barnabas, who has been impacted by the power of the spirit and just lays everything, not only before the apostles, but before the Lord.

[11:04] He's called the great encourager. I love encouragers. And he encourages so many people in their journey. I'm going to end this morning with a story.

It's a true story. And it's about a man called Evan. His name was called Evan Roberts. He was born in a Welsh mining village in 1878.

He was the ninth of 14 children. And at 12 years old, Evan, like many children of his age, left school to go down into the colliery and into the mines along with his father and the rest of his male family. With such a limited education, he wasn't well read. But Evan knew his Bible. Very rarely was he seen without his Bible. And he even took it into the mine.

He was deeply dedicated to prayer. And people would say that he would often miss sleep to pray through the night. God called him. And he left the mine.

[12:07] A big financial step for him in that day. And he went to college where he experienced a move and a filling and a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

And he felt compelled to share that with others. This week or last week in 1904, at just 26 years old, Evan Roberts stood at the end of a prayer meeting in front of 17 people.

And he shared these things. He asked them to, one, confess your sins. Two, get rid of anything in your life that could get between you and God.

Three, obey the Holy Spirit. And four, publicly declared Jesus a saviour. All 17 of the people there made a commitment that night.

And in the following weeks, they too went out and shared that with others. And many responded to that call. From there, Evan was called to tour Wales.

[13:11] And in this move of the Holy Spirit, he shared that message. He said himself that he wasn't a great preacher. But the message that he'd been given, those four things, drew people in their thousands.

They flocked to the meetings. And over 18 months, 100,000 people made their commitment to Jesus Christ. And the Welsh revival broke out.

Newspapers reported from collieries to cities that people were aflame with the glory of God. Police courts were hardly necessary.

Pubs and clubs were deserted as people moved into churches and into chapels. And they prayed both night and day and went out and flooded their community with the love of God, which was transformed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The thing is, never be tempted or deceived that the attractiveness of the early church can happen in our generation.

[14:21] It can. Because it said in that reading, all the believers were one in heart and mind. One in heart and mind.

They were together. They were family. No one claimed that any of their possessions were their own. But they shared everything they had. And with great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And God's grace was so powerfully at work within them all. That's the fact that we're going to be able to do. That's the fact that we were going to do. That's the fact that we were going to do. That's the fact that we were going to do. That's the fact that we were going to do. Is that a picture that grasps you this morning? It does for me.

That sense of love and grace outpouring into our communities is surely something that we should aspire to and be open to.

Maybe you're asking for that now in your life to be that transformational move of the Holy Spirit. To maybe transform your thinking.

[15:32] To renew you. To renew your life. To give you a fresh perspective on God's purposes.