**Kingdom of God Pt 6 Church response**

Last week, I spoke on our response to the Kingdom of God, but as I prepared it, I recognised that there is a corporate response needed too. Not only us as individuals, but as the church of gathered people.

Remember that when I speak of the church, I am not talking about some organisation out there but of us cooperating together as the church. The church is us.

We are told that while the church is not the Kingdom of God, we are to live out the values of the Kingdom of God in this world, resisting the ever-present temptation to usher in the Kingdom of God by political or power means.[[1]](#footnote-1)

We are told that the church is to be “the community through its behaviour and mission the reign of God becomes visible”.[[2]](#footnote-2) Are we?

We are told that the church is to be credible witnesses to the love, justice and mercy of God to the surrounding communities. That God has chosen the church to model something of his Kingdom purposes to a watching world.[[3]](#footnote-3) Are we?

We are told that the church must not only be a repentant community, committed to truth, but also a holy community in order to model the kingdom of God in the world.[[4]](#footnote-4) Are we?

That is what we aim for as a group of believers gathered together as a church, exhibiting the character of the Kingdom of God. That is what we like to think we are doing now.

Let me bring us back to earth with a reality check:

In his doctrinal research in 2013, Dr Michael Crudge of the NZ Baptist Union found there were 9 dominant perceptions (in no particular order) held by New Zealanders about the church.

Perception 1: The church is not a spiritual place.

Perception 2: The church is stuck in the past, in a time where it had power and abused its control.

Perception 3: The church and Christians lack integrity.

Perception 4: Free, independent thinkers don’t need the church.

Perception 5: Church is oppressive.

Perception 6: Christianity is not seen as relevant or necessary.

Perception 7a: Most Christians are nutters.

Perception 7b: Some Christians do amazing good.

Perception 8: The church is after your money.

Perception 9: The church? Who cares?[[5]](#footnote-5)

I do not see here any of the Kingdom of God values we have been talking about.

These are confronting perceptions, because I think it highlights that we are not living or not seen to the living like the Kingdom of God is here and coming.

This should cause some deep soul-searching questions, not only for those in leadership but for all of us who call Eastside our home.

Have we dropped the ball in explaining the Kingdom of God?

The kingdom only becomes a reality for people when our vision of the world, infused with the coming reign of God, is shared with others.[[6]](#footnote-6)

That is why I have spent so much time over the last month describing and identifying the Kingdom of God, because we cannot share what we do not know.

Jesus came to establish an alternate community centred on values from that invisible world, “on earth as it is in heaven.” Seen in that light, the kingdom of heaven prescribes a way of life that promotes what matters most and lasts longest.[[7]](#footnote-7)

When we live out the values of the Kingdom of God, those adverse perceptions found by Mike Crudge should disappear because we should be or could be the purveyors of hope, a positive alternative to the dog-eat-dog world we live in.

That community is the church and it is not here for its own sake. If it takes its own path and runs counter to God’s kingdom, the church loses its right to exist and becomes a superfluous religious society.[[8]](#footnote-8) As the research identified, we become irrelevant

When we gather as a family of believers, we are to be the visible church to a world who does not see anything else.

And because “the church” is what it judged, then we need to be exhibiting kingdom values and not worldly values.

Historically we have not had a good track record in that regard in the world. Too often the church has fallen into the trap of wielding power when we should have been wielding love.

Too often we have turned the kingdom of God into Christendom, where power over is the norm, where it fostered pogroms; fostered the Spanish Inquisition; fostered Colonialism and fostered oppression. It has colluded with tyrants like Hitler. As the research found, we had power and abused its control.

And we are sorry that happened. That is not the ways of the Kingdom of God. We need to remedy that.

And we have weakened our witness by something called cheap grace, making the kingdom of God more palatable to the world by watering down what Jesus said and commanded us to do.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

We need to reclaim the importance and centrality of Jesus and the Kingdom of God, where we value above all things our faith in Jesus Christ.

So, how do we reclaim the values of the Kingdom of God in the church? How do we as Eastside exhibit the values of the Kingdom of God to our community here in Invercargill?

When I speak of Kingdom values, I mean the principles and standards that characterize the Kingdom of God as revealed in the Bible. These values that are central to the teachings of Jesus Christ and are meant to guide the behaviour and attitudes of us as a church. That contrast with worldly values and emphasize spiritual priorities over material or temporal concerns.

Let me touch on 9 of those values.

1. Love and Compassion

At the heart of Kingdom values is love, which is the greatest commandment. Jesus emphasized love for God and love for neighbour as foundational (Matthew 22:37-39).

This love is not merely an emotion but is demonstrated through actions of compassion and kindness, transcending social and ethnic boundaries.

The reality of love is often defined in other terms like forgiveness, reconciliation, avoidance of judgement, compassion.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Are we known for our love of people?

2. Humility and Servanthood

Humility is another key value in the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught that greatness in the Kingdom is measured by our willingness to serve others.

In Matthew 20:26-28 , Jesus states, "*Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*."

This principle is further illustrated when Jesus washes the disciples' feet, modelling servanthood (John 13:1-17).

The way we treat others is the better test of our humility than the way we speak about ourselves. [[11]](#footnote-11)

How are we treating others?

3. Righteousness and Justice

Righteousness and justice are also integral to Kingdom values. Believers are called to live upright lives and to seek justice for the oppressed.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*" (Matthew 5:6).

The prophets also echo this call, urging God's people to "*let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream*" (Amos 5:24).

What does righteousness look like here in the 21st century? Righteousness means right living according to the standards set by God.

The justice of God is also not what the world thinks justice is. God’s justice is not primarily a retributive justice but a restorative or reconstructive justice, a saving action by God that recreates Shalom and makes things right.[[12]](#footnote-12)

5. Faith and Trust in God

Faith is a cornerstone of Kingdom values. We are encouraged to trust in God's provision and sovereignty. Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:33 , "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you*."

This trust is not passive but is active, demonstrated through obedience and reliance on God's promises.

Where do we sit with trusting God?

6. Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Forgiveness is a critical value in the Kingdom of God. Jesus instructs His followers to forgive others as they have been forgiven by God (Matthew 6:14-15).

The parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35) underscores the importance of extending forgiveness and seeking reconciliation, reflecting God's grace and mercy.

In a world that chooses violence, we are to take care to build peace and to be agents of reconciliation wherever possible. [[13]](#footnote-13)

Forgiveness is hard, reconciliation is hard. No one said it would be easy, but that is hat we are called to.

7. Peace and Peacemaking

Peace is a hallmark of the Kingdom, and believers are called to be peacemakers. Jesus pronounces a blessing on peacemakers, stating, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God*" (Matthew 5:9).

This value involves not only the absence of conflict but also the active pursuit of harmony and reconciliation in relationships.

In a book called *Living gently in a violent world*, we are reminded that our task is to be faithful, peaceful people wherever we are.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Are we exhibiting peace in the church? Never mind the lack of peace outside the church, how are we doing with living peacefully together?

8. Joy and Contentment

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and a value of the Kingdom. Believers are encouraged to find joy in their relationship with God and in the hope of eternal life. The apostle Paul writes, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*" (Philippians 4:4).

Contentment, closely related to joy, is the ability to find satisfaction in God's provision, regardless of circumstances (Philippians 4:11-13).

Elijah’s most common thread of his prayer is “Thank you God”, becsuse he knows the joy and contentment from God, in him and his family to this safe country and safe city.

We need to grab a little of that from him.

9. Integrity and Honesty

Integrity and honesty are essential Kingdom values. Believers are called to live truthfully and transparently, reflecting God's character. Proverbs 12:22 states, "*Lying lips are detestable to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight.*"

 Jesus also emphasizes the importance of truthfulness in speech, instructing His followers to let their "Yes" be "Yes," and their "No," "No" (Matthew 5:37).

It is the patience and integrity of believers that draws people to consider the gospel of Christ. [[15]](#footnote-15) And this has been so since it was recognised by Justin Martyr in 100AD

These Kingdom values are not merely ideals but are meant to be lived out in our daily lives, demonstrated by this church, serving as a witness to the transformative power of the Gospel and the reality of God's Kingdom on earth.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Do we need reminding of the words of Samuel Chadwick: The way of sovereignty is by way of the cross. The badge of authority is service, the mark of distinction is humility, and the right to rule is a power to obey.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The visible church is not only the bearer of Christ’s message; it is itself to be the message.[[18]](#footnote-18)

We are not just the bearer of Christ’ message, we are the message.

The church by its actions/lack of action, words and behaviour should demonstrate the Kingdom of God. How are we doing?

Dream a little and ask yourself what if we believed in those kingdom values and lived them, and exhibited them to the world? What would happen?

1. Charles Colson *Against the night: living in the dark ages* 93 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Colson 92 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hathaway 160 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Colson 155 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://mikecrudge.com/2013/12/12/perceptions-of-church/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Duncan MacLaren *Mission Implausible: restoring credibility to the church* 131 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Philip Yancey *Rumours of another world* 201 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Christopher Marshall “The Kingdom of God: doing God’s will on earth as in heaven” *Reality* Aug/Sept 2004 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Dietrich Bonhoeffer *The Cost of Discipleship* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Donald Senior *Jesus: a Gospel portrait* 92 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Gary Thomas *Thirsting for God*. 155 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Christopher Marshall *Beyond Retribution* 534. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Marva J. Dawn *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* 115 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Stanley Hauerwas & Jean Vanier *Living gently in a violent world: the prophetic witness of weakness* 104 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Doug Webster *The Easy Yoke* 76 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. https://biblehub.com/topical/k/kingdom\_values.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Samuel Chadwick *The Way To Pentecost* 65 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Tim Keel *Intuitive Leadership* 156 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)