

Our church values - lovingly diverse

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[0 : 00] So, I'm going to start again in the same way as I started last week, which is to see whether you can remember the six values that we are trying to instill on our church life together.

So, six values that we are committed to as a church. It gets more difficult as it goes on. So, if you go early, you're bound to know one of them. But the later you leave it, the less likely you are to know one of them. So, come on, shout them out.

Shout them out. Gospel-centered, that's right, yes. We want to be a church which is centered on the gospel, that recognizes the message of Jesus Christ. The cross of Jesus Christ is right at the center of the Bible. Yes, prayerfully dependent. We are dependent on the Lord for everything.

This is not us relying on one another, but us relying together on the Lord. Spirit-led. Well, that's a great one, isn't it? But it's behind all of those, isn't it?

So, I think if you, like, gospel-centered means basically Bible-centered. Dependent on the Lord basically means we're relying on the Spirit to do the works. So, yeah. Yeah. Good save, Steve. Sorry?

[1 : 17] Locally rooted. Yes. So, we are in a particular place that gives us a responsibility for the people around us, for the people who the Lord has brought us, for the particular time that we find ourselves in as well. Yeah?

Keep the commandments. Keep the commandments. Not one of the values on here, no. But, you know, it's a good thing to listen to God's commands. Yeah.

Servant leadership. Sorry? Servant leadership. Yes. So, about the people who lead the church are servants of the church to help the members do the ministry of the church.

So, it's not kind of a top-down lead. It is us as shepherds trying to encourage you to flourish in ministry. Yeah? Elise said it. Kingdom-minded. Which means that we are not just concerned about our own church, but we're concerned about the work of the gospel beyond our own church, even in Mongolia, in Ulaanbaatar, this evening.

Have we done all of them? No. We're missing the one that I'm doing tonight, right? Which is about lovingly diverse. Lovingly diverse. So, here you go. Gospel-centered. Dependent on the Lord. Lovingly diverse. Servantly led.

[2 : 31] Kingdom-minded. Kingdom-minded. I've dropped most of the LYs, because I can't say kingdomly. Locally rooted. So, there you go. That is not an exhaustive thing of everything a church needs to do, but we're trying to just capture, in a brief way, what it means for us to be a local church here, and what we are considering together.

And tonight, we're looking at being lovingly diverse. Now, I think this is perhaps a little bit different to the previous two. So, we have thought about being gospel-centered and thought about being dependent on the Lord.

I don't think you could find a church that would disagree with either of those things, right? If you find a church that doesn't want to be centered on the gospel and doesn't want to depend on the Lord, you've not found a church. You've found something completely different, right?

But when it comes to diversity, it is fair to say that churches have had different opinions on exactly how this is to be reflected and worked out in the life of a local church.

It has been trendy over the years to run what they call homogenous churches, which is churches that are centered around something other than just the gospel, but being centered around a particular demographic.

[3 : 38] Now, in a way, that is kind of inevitable to a certain point, right? We are meeting in English, right? If we met in a different language, it would be inaccessible to quite a lot of us, depending on what that language was.

So, we do have to make some decisions which make it accessible to some people and less accessible to others. But beyond that, the homogenous church principle says that the best way to grow a local church is to try and get people who are like one another in other ways and gather them together.

So, you end up with student churches, churches which are particularly directed at a certain demographic. You have things like youth services or you have churches which are particularly for a certain ethnic background.

I remember once as a student in a large Anglican church in the north of the country, being told that students were supposed to sit in a particular place in the church building.

So, the church had a balcony and we sat down and when they got to that bit where you're supposed to say hello to each other in church, which they had in that church, the people turned around to us in front of us and said, oh no, the students sit in the balcony.

[4 : 47] And so, welcome to you too, you know. It's this idea that really you're supposed to do church around people who are like you. Now, we don't think that looking at the Bible, that's what local church really should feel like.

We think that actually the local church should be a diverse collection of people from all sorts of different national backgrounds, from all different sort of ages, from all different sorts of socioeconomic groups as well.

People who have been university educated, people who have not, people who are working in all sorts of different industries. Now, I think there are loads of ways I could prove to you from the scriptures that that is a good thing to do.

But I've been sort of puzzling thinking about what is the best way to do that. And I think one of the most helpful books, which is probably the worst cover on this, is this book by Bruce Milne called Dynamic Diversity.

It's written quite a long time ago, but actually it is a really, really brilliant little book on why diverse church matters and what it should look like. Has anyone read this? Even seen this? Other than me just holding it up now? No?

[5 : 55] Okay, well, there you go. You're all missing out on Bruce Milne's book. And also that's good because I'm going to rip off quite a lot of what he says tonight. So I can do that to you and you won't have known it before.

One of the things that he really helpfully does is he says that the local church is supposed to be a sort of window into new creation. We are in the local church getting a window into what God is doing in a new creation, recreation.

We've been seeing that, haven't we, in Mark's Gospel on Sunday mornings, that this is like a new beginning. And then he goes through the Bible and points out that actually at a number of different theological stages, you should be able to understand that a diverse church is what God would do and should be doing.

And we should have understood that. So he talks about six proofs that diversity is important in the church. And I'm just going to run through them. I'm going to spend about two minutes on each one. And then I'm going to have some questions for discussion at the end.

But feel free to shout out if you don't understand where we're going. So he says here are the six proofs. We should know because of what God is like. We should know because what we are made like.

[7 : 01] We should know because what God became. We should know because of what God did. We should know because of what the church is called to be. And finally, because of what we are destined for.

So let's start with those and we'll whist through them. Firstly, what God is like. What do you think about the character of God that means that diversity in the local church should be important? What is it about God that means diversity should be important? He made lots of people. Yeah, but that's going to be more about, you know, what we were made like.

I've got a word in my mind. You've got to think of what it is. It begins with a T and it ends in rinity. Trinity. Yeah, our God is a tri unity, a trinity, a union of three persons, each equally divine, distinct, but not separate in one Godhead.

Now, I'm not going to prove the Trinity to you. I am going to assume that you are convinced of God, the Father, God, the Son and God, the Holy Spirit. Three persons, one God already.

[8 : 10] But from the very first idea in the scriptures, this is introduced to us. This idea of unity in diversity is presented to us in that God himself is Father, Son and Spirit is unity in diversity.

And he creates the world, God, the Father, by his word through the Spirit. Now, importantly, that means that for creation to be the overflow of the triune God.

Yeah, we we must say creation is not necessary for God, is it? It doesn't make creation because he's lacking in something that can't be right. God is sufficient in himself. Right. He doesn't need anything else.

So creation is the overflow of who God is. It is the outworking of his character in creation is a kind of overflow rather than a necessary thing. That means that you would expect unity and diversity to be reflected in the world that he made.

And that's exactly what you find, isn't it? If you think about it, the difference between how God creates and how we create, you can see it. We mass produce stuff, don't we?

[9 : 14] Yeah, we we make cars that all look the same. God raises the sun in the morning and it looks different every single morning. He paints a new picture every day.

God is diversity and unity. We mass produce and he does not. So what God is like, that's the first one. Secondly, what we are made like in your Bibles, turn to Genesis, chapter one, Genesis, chapter one.

And verse 26. And verse 26. Genesis chapter one and verse 26. God tells us this about the creation of humanity.

Genesis one verse 26. Then God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds in the air, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them, male and female. He created them.

[10 : 29] Now, that's not really that surprising, is it? Given what we have seen about God being a tri unity, that God is personality in relationship, then he makes humanity as also personality in relationship.

God makes humanity male and female in his image. And this kind of unity and diversity is then woven into the world that God has made and into the way that he has made us.

This is an interesting aside, but I think it's important. Why is the definition of marriage so important to a church, right? Why does it actually matter?

It's not because of a distinction between love. It's because of a distinction between people.

Marriage in Genesis one, two and three. I mean, in the whole Bible, but Genesis one and two, particularly.

Marriage is the coming together of distinct persons who are different to one another. That is the nature of marriage in the Bible. It is the difference being united.

[11 : 36] And so actually, the sort of the problem with gay marriage or even trans theory is that it obliterates difference. It is anti diversity, if you like, which is odd, isn't it?

Because they would say they are pro diversity. But actually, in the Bible's terms, they are anti diversity, because what is meant to go on in Genesis one and two is that given we are created in the image of a God who is unity in diversity, he creates men and women to also be unity in diversity. God has put that into creation. Now, if that's what creation is like, then Bruce Milne would argue that that's what you should expect in new creation. We should expect that the gathering of the church is a gathering of people who are distinct from one another, but you united together a community which reflects the unity and diversity in a way that Genesis one and two did for a very, very short time.

Okay, we're going to blast through because we've only got a few minutes on each and I want to spend time discussing it. Thirdly, what God became. Where do you think unity and diversity might be in what God became?

What do you think you might be talking about here? Any suggestions? Jesus. Yeah, gone. He came flesh. Yes. So think about what's happening in the incarnation.

[12 : 55] God, the son is taking on human flesh. The eternally divine second person of the Trinity is taking to himself human flesh. So at the one at the same time, he is both fully divine and fully man, fully God and fully man.

And he does that for our salvation. So think about the things that are tied together in the person of Christ. Right. You have eternal God and time bound human being.

You have an infinite being and a finite being. You have the transcendent God with the place bound person. You have the omnipotent deity and you have human weakness.

You have this embracing of the other, if you like, in the incarnation. It's almost so incomprehensible to us, isn't it? That the that the incarnation can bring together these things which we would just say can never be brought together.

But they are brought together in the incarnation because of love. Right. It's a good thing driven by the love of God. And the point is that Bruce Mill makes in his book, which is really helpful, is that if God in the incarnation bridges such a gulf in order to bring salvation, should we not also be bridging gulfs in our relationships with one another in order to share that salvation with others?

[14:17] Of course, he's right, isn't he? If a church is not bridging any divides, then we're not really reflecting how Christ saved us in the incarnation by coming down from the glories of heaven, putting on human flesh for us.

Okay, so that's what God became. Fourthly, I think, yeah, what God did. For all the brilliance of the incarnation, you've then got the spectacular achievements of the atonement of the cross.

And what is happening at the cross? Well, the sinful savior is becoming sin for us. He is punished and we are set free. God is satisfying his love, which moves towards us in mercy and grace, and his justice, which demands that every sin is punished and every injustice is put right.

And by doing that, he does that on the cross and the effect of sin begins to be undone. Isaiah 53 says that is by his wounds that we are healed, not meaning that anybody who comes to Christ will be physically healed from that moment, but rather that it is through the wounds of the cross that the that the healing from sin and its effects are brought about.

So turn then with me and we'll see how this works out to Ephesians chapter two, Ephesians chapter two, verses 14 to 18, and we'll see together how this works.

[15:46] The undoing of sin in the atonement, says Paul, means the undoing of hostility between people. So Ephesians chapter two, verse 14.

For he himself, that's the Lord Jesus Christ, is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility. Interesting, isn't it, that Paul assumes that Christ's atoning work on the cross has not only reconciled us to a holy God, but has also brought us into relationship with one another.

The things that have divided us in the past have now been broken down in Christ. Specifically here, the divide between Jew and Gentile that is established in the old covenant has now been destroyed in Jesus Christ, who has made us all one, all access to the Father by one spirit.

[17:11] That means if we're going to emphasize the gospel as a church, we're going to emphasize the reconciliation that we enjoy between one another, that there are no divides now between us because we all come to one Father in one spirit through one Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are brothers and sisters, aren't we, in church. Fifthly, what the church is called to be. Think about what the Bible says are pictures or metaphors of the church in the New Testament. Think of the words that the New Testament might use to describe church. Can you think of any? Sorry? The Bride of Christ, yeah?

The family of God, yeah? Body, yeah. The body is the most dominant image in the New Testament. I think we quite like church family, don't we, because we like to talk like that.

But actually, body is a really important image in the New Testament for the church. We are the body of Christ. Turn to Romans 12, verses 3 to 6.

[18:27] Let me just point this out to you. Romans 12. Verse 3.

Verse 3. For by the grace given to me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, though many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. Amazing, isn't it? The distinction and difference is part of what it means for us to be a body.

A body is not all arm or all leg. We're all different to one another. And that's sort of what you would expect the gospel to do, given what we have seen about who God is and how he works, that God in Christ is knitting together a body of believers who are all distinct and different to one another.

[19 : 37] If you look around church and you go, well, wait a minute, they're not like me. They don't like quite the same things that I like. They're not quite gifted in the same way that I'm gifted. You should go, brilliant. That means our church is made up of people who are different.

That means we are a reflection of the body of Christ. I think it's quite common to look at some of these images in the New Testament and think, OK, that's all right, but that's talking about the universal church. But actually, more often than not, the New Testament is really just talking about the local church.

We are a local expression of the body of Christ. Here in West Kilburn. So the distinction between the parts is part of our joy together and a reflection of what God has done.

Finally, what we are destined for. This is the image in the book of Revelation. God's people are gathered around the throne. You can turn to it quickly if you want to. Revelation 7, this is 9 to 10. John writes this, After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count. From every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

[20 : 43] They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

It's interesting here, isn't it, that there is a similarity between everybody. Everyone is wearing a white robe. This represents Christ's atoning work, doesn't it? We are covered in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus.

We have been purified from our sin. But notice that the distinction between people is still there. As John looks at the vision, he sees people who are clearly from different nations and tribes and peoples and languages.

And that is part of the joy of what he sees. It's not that all of a sudden all of those differences are completely obliterated so that everybody looks the same in glory. No, actually the distinctions between us, the national tribal language distinctions, are a reflection of God's great plan in glory. So it's right, isn't it, for us to think that glory is not, you know, separate services for different groups of people. You're not going to go there and go, I'm going to be part of the millennials group or something. Or I'm going to be in the kind of middle age group.

[21 : 57] No, actually we are going to be all together, unified in our diversity. The distinction is still visible because God is still glorious. Here I think this is probably, if you try and summarise all of this together, why is it important that we are lovingly diverse?

It's because our God is so great that he can save people from every different cultural background and bring them to himself through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have a church which is not very diverse, what you can end up doing is having quite a small saviour because he can only save people like you or like me.

But our saviour can save all kinds of people, can't he, from wherever they are. Okay, so that is why we want to be lovingly diverse.

I want you, just with the person next to you, ooh, that's quite small, but there you go, have a go at this. Just to think about this and discuss it together for five minutes and we'll share our answers and then I'll pray. What sort of things could we do to help build, reflect and embrace this diversity?

What sort of things would hamper it? And what would be the blessing of keeping working for this? Okay, so why is it worth keeping going with that? Yes, go on. So what kind of diversity am I talking about?

[23 : 22] That's a really good question and I made a big assumption. I think you could have chosen so many other things as a diversity. So diversity, I would say, we are different to one another, both in gender and age and background and nationality and language, that kind of diversity.

We are not diverse in our beliefs and our doctrines. Okay, so a church where everybody believes something different about who Jesus is, is not diverse.

It's chaos and it's not really a church, is it? So we are unified in our belief in the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Yeah, thank you for clarifying that. That's really helpful. Well, have a discussion of those

things and then we will get back together.

And if it's controversial, that's going to be fun. Okay, sorry to interrupt your conversations.

Does anyone want to share the most helpful thing that came out of their discussion? So Tex and I were talking at the back there with Sam as well.

[24 : 38] And one of the things that Tex said, which was really helpful, was that the world takes the diversity that is embraced by the Bible and twists it into something sinful and says that means we need to agree with everything that everybody says.

And that's not what the Bible means by diversity. What the Bible means by diversity is that because of what Christ has done, people from all sorts of different backgrounds can be united together in the person of the Lord Jesus.

And we can say to people, I disagree. And that actually doesn't threaten the unity that's given in the Lord Jesus, because that's where it's rooted. Yeah, that was really helpful text. Thank you. Yeah.

Yeah. Yes. Yep. So it's an encouraging thing at the minute. The leadership team is very diverse, which is very encouraging. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Lucy. Great. Thank you, Alexandra.

[25 : 52] That's great. It's nice to have people interacting on the Zoom service. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you, Dorot.

That's interesting, isn't it? Romans 12, verse 3. Like, I love the practicality of Paul's letters these great doctrines. Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought.

Yeah. But, yeah, it's so helpful, isn't it? Think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the faith that God has distributed to each of you. If you basically believe the only thing you brought to your salvation was your sin, then surely you shouldn't be putting yourself above anybody else in the life of the church.

Yeah. Yeah. Anybody else? Yeah. Well, there you go.

That was inspiring. Anybody else want to share anything else? I said we don't necessarily control who walks through our doors. Yeah. Yeah. but we do control how we interact and welcome them and not feel that not making them feel that they're not our sort of Christian or our sort of thinking yeah, that's really helpful yes, Clifford?

[27 : 14] I think contrasting that there's a world diversity yes and holding that understanding that we represent the people of others and we have compromising it's important yes, that's really helpful I think as well the other thing is not to be afraid to call the world out for robbing Christian truth and presenting it as their own the world is quite anti-racism but actually your only grounds for being anti-racist are really Genesis 1 so the idea that we're all created in the image of God and that actually we're all diversely made by one loving creator God is really the only true grounds that you can defend that anti-racist position from so to try and rob that Christian truth and present it as a truth that's kind of self-evident in an atheistic world is nonsense yeah the more diverse we are the better a witness we are because people go what holds that group of people together answers the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ let's end with that thought let me pray for us and then we will head home let me pray

Heavenly Father how we thank you that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ this great news that we have been saved from our sin by Christ alone through his death on the cross in our place his resurrection to new life life that is promised to all who believe and trust in him thank you that that message brings together people of all sorts of different ages and stages and backgrounds and nations and languages and we pray that we would do all that we can as a church to be unified in Christ in the midst of great diversity and that that would be good for us it would be a taste of heaven for us and it would be good for others as they witness what is going on with that group of people who is at the centre of that church holding that together it's the Lord Jesus Christ we pray for the glory of your name Amen Amen Thanks everybody