**Two Rivers Mission Community**

**Values 3: Word and Spirit**

**Ezekiel 37.1-14 John 1.1-14**

Today we come to the third of our sermons looking at the values we believe God is calling us to grow and display in the life of our churches.

We’ve looked so far at ‘love’ and ‘faith’.

Today we looked at the slightly less obvious ‘being people of ‘Word and Spirit’’.

Let’s begin by unpacking these two words: Word and Spirit.

Firstly, ‘Word’

St John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, began the prologue to his Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word’… capital ‘W’.

This ‘Word’ is of course the pre-existent Son of God, ‘begotten not made; of one being with the Father’.

The One who as to come into the world in the person of Jesus.

The One who came to reveal the mind of God; to speak the word of God.

As Hebrews 1.1, puts it *‘In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”*

When we say then that we want to be “people of the Word”, we are saying that we want to be people who listen to and obey the Word; Jesus.

But how do we know what the Word (capital ‘W’), Jesus, is saying to us?

Well, we know through the word (small ‘w’), the bible.

St Paul writes in his second letter to Timothy, *‘The Holy Scriptures [are] able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. All scripture is God breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.’* (2 Timothy 3.15-17).

The Bible is the inspired word of God.

And it is this book that we hear the voice of Jesus today.

To be people of the Word means that whilst we will use our human reason, experience and church tradition to help us understand what God has to say to us, these will always be complimentary to and not substitutes for the Bible.

So, what about being “people of the Spirit”?

Well, at the last supper, Jesus told his disciples that he was going away (to heaven) but that they should not worry…

He was going to send them ‘another helper’ i.e. a helper just like him.

That helper is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit would, amongst other things:

* Bring people to new birth as God’s children (John 3.3-8)
* Teach people all about Jesus (John 14.26)
* Help people to pray (Romans 8.26)
* Make people more like Jesus (Galatians 5.22-23)
* Give people gifts and talents to grow the church and build God’s kingdom (1 Corinthians 12.4-11)
* Help people share the good news of Jesus (Acts 1.8)

During his life, Jesus modelled what someone filled with the Holy Spirit could do.

Jesus modelled listening to God and understanding what God was doing and wanted him to do.

He modelled powerfully sharing the word of God.

He modelled healing.

He modelled driving out demons and setting people free from their power.

He modelled patient suffering and forgiveness.

And he said to his followers that they would do even greater things than these. (John 14.12).

So, being people of Word and Spirit will mean being people who are rooted in Jesus (the Word), and who with the help of the Holy Spirit, read the Bible, apply it to our lives and put it into practice.

It will mean being people who are open to the Holy Spirit and his being active in us and through us.

David Watson, one of the great church leaders of the late 20th century famously said:

“All Word and no Spirit, we dry up;

all Spirit and no Word, we blow up;

both Word and Spirit, we grow up”.

What might he have meant by this little phrase?

Well, a church can be really good at reading the bible, it can heave really great sermons where the bible is taught and homegroups where people learn more. People can quote the bible in any and every situation.

But unless there is room for the Spirit to apply the words of scripture to peoples’ lives; unless there is room for the Spirit to effect people deep down inside, then all this head knowledge will remain just that – head knowledge.

At the other extreme, a church can be open to the Spirit; making space for the Spirit to speak and act.

But if that church is not rooted in the scriptures there’s a very real danger that it will cut loose of its moorings and become… well.. loopy…

David Watson’s contention, and I would agree, is that a healthy church needs both – to be rooted in the scriptures and make space for the Holy Spirit to bring the word of God to life and apply it to our particular, present day, lives.

Its then that a church community grows to maturity.

So, if we are going to be people of “Word and Spirit” what might our churches look like?

Well, we will certainly have a deep love for the bible. We’ll read it at home, talk about it in homegroups, work hard at producing good sermons on a Sunday that help people engage with the Scriptures.

We’ll use the bible to help us make decisions in our personal lives – how we prioritise our time, what we spend our money on, how we conduct our relationships.

When we are making decisions at PCC or Mission Council we’ll consider seriously what the bible says. We might even hear people say, “Well, doesn’t the bible say….”

We’ll use the bible when we are trying to make up our minds about difficult moral issues. The Church of England is taking time at the moment to think through issues around sexuality and gender. We won’t just say, “Well, everyone out there thinks X so to be relevant we must do the same.” No, we’ll try to understand what God has said in the bible and be obedient to it.

And we’ll do all these things because we have a firm conviction that God is just a bit cleverer than we are!

When we have a decision to make, and God seems to say one thing in his Word but we’d rather do the opposite, we’ll go with what God says, because we know that he is much wiser and more full of love than we can ever be.

And we’ll be obedient to him because we love him; and our highest goal is to please him.

In these ways we’ll be people of the Word.

What then about being people of the Spirit?

Let me give you an example.

We read in the bible that Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan to encourage people to help their neighbour in need.

But there are a million ways we could put this parable into practice… as individuals and as churches.

And so we pray for the Holy Spirit to show us how to put this parable into practice in our own lives.

Who is my neighbour who needs my particular help today? What can I do to help them?

Not often, but just occasionally, I get a sense that I should visit someone. Sometimes that person will say, “I was feeling really down. I guess God sending you round means that he hasn’t forgotten me”.

I know others of you will have had the experience of being in just the right place at just the right time.

Being people of the Spirit means being open to these little nudges and acting on them.

Being people of the Spirit does mean making time to just sit in the presence of the Holy Spirit and listen… just like being people of the word means taking time to read the bible.

Being people of the Spirit means being open and expectant.

It means sometimes taking a risk … sharing what you think the Spirit might be saying to you or to the church.. we won’t always get it right but we are amongst friends and we’ll bear with one another..

It means not rushing through our church services so quickly that there’s no time for God to get a word in edgeways…

It means making time, whether on a Sunday or at other times, to use some of the gifts of the Spirit which Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 12, such as speaking in tongues or prophesy; praying for healing.

Its not easy being a Christian in today’s world.

Its not easy being church in our communities.

But God has given us two wonderful things to make it possible; his Word and his Spirit.

Lets gratefully accept these two wonderful gifts; making the most of them at every opportunity,

And let’s see what God does when we do.

In Jesus name,

Amen