

The Parable of Susan Boyle

Written by Administrator

Friday, 01 May 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Friday, 17 September 2010 10:56

June 2009

I spend a significant proportion of my life planning or participating in big meetings and services. Last month saw our Baptist Assembly which welcomed well over 2,000 people to the Bournemouth International Centre. The planning for the event took more than eighteen months and hundreds contributed to the leadership of the programme. It was a wonderful event and was full of challenge and inspiration. I also attended district services in West London, Yorkshire and Cornwall, where a number of churches grouped together to plan special services of worship and testimony and where I had the privilege of preaching. They were quite different occasions from one another and were all full of life and encouragement.

These “big occasions” take a lot of planning and effort and so it is good to ask whether they are worth all the effort. Could they not be a distraction from the life and witness of the local church? Good question! I am more and more convinced that such bigger events are crucial to our life together because they help to rescue us from our natural self-centredness.

It has always struck me that the basic problem with the church is that it is made up of sinners. On the face of it you are asking for trouble to bring together a lot of sinners in one place! To be sure we come together for a wonderful reason – because we have discovered a Saviour who can set us free from our sin. Nevertheless, the Bible is very clear that even as Christians we continue to be troubled by sin (and anyone who claims otherwise is a liar etc.. see 1 John chapter 1). Therefore, a local church needs to work hard to ensure that it isn't moulded by the selfish expectations of its members. It is terrifyingly possible for a local church to be a community that simply does the things that pander to its own whims and fancies.

A local church needs to work hard to ensure that it is open to the world beyond the local church. Most crucially this needs to happen in times of worship. Does the worship focus exclusively on the devotional life of the worshippers or on God's love for the whole world? Are the prayers ones which engage with the needs of the local community, other local churches and the needs of wider society or are they simply focused on the needs of church members? Does the preaching help the worshippers to understand how they can relate their faith to their family, daily work and community?

Churches have a terrifying capacity for self-centredness and so every local church needs to

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work hard to help everyone to see the bigger picture. Big events are certainly not the one and only answer to this – but I sincerely believe that they can help. To worship with a larger congregation can be a huge encouragement, and hearing the testimonies from others can bring new shafts of light into our lives, and new ideas to the lives of our fellowships. In short – grasping the bigger picture is not a luxury, but is at the heart of serving God today.