



TRINITY CHURCH

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Hi there,

As I walked over to church early this morning the frost was still sharp, the air invigoratingly fresh, and the sky was a majestic clear blue with the winter sun just clearing the horizon. It was beautiful and felt so God-given. High in one area of the sky was a spray of half a dozen or so brilliant white aeroplane vapour trails. I paused to enjoy and noticed how the vapour trails were all basically heading in the same direction which often isn't the case. I'm more used to seeing something like a criss-cross of vapour trails with the planes going in all directions. I shared this with the prayer meeting I was heading to because I felt God may be saying several things to us through this. I believe God wants to encourage Trinity that with our ecumenical mix, with our history, and with the various strands of the emerging vision, which for some may seem messy and still unclear, He sees us very much on a journey together heading in a broad direction and He wants to affirm this. I'm going to sum this direction up as 'continuing in Him and growing as disciples (and so better knowing Him and the love He lavishes on us as His children (see 1 John 2:28-3:1)) as well as sharing Him with others yet to become disciples.'

With this in mind I believe God is saying we need to continue to purposefully pursue His purposes and to do this we need to allow the Spirit to break out and to break down our walls (as the Worship Central song says) and be bold, courageous and creative. Doing this isn't necessarily neat and tidy, but that's okay. The important thing is that we are on a journey, and so on the move, seeking to follow Jesus, and we need to be inviting others to accompany us. And, as with any journey, each has highs and lows and occasionally, even with the best GPS, we can end up going a way we hadn't intended. I think one of the most important things I'm hearing God saying to me is about how I approach my journey. Some journeys are more inviting than others, and I've certainly been on some trips I've really looked forward to but, at times during them, have found them really hard. The same is true for our spiritual journeys, and as we travel we need to be alert to the things that will bust our faith and knock us off course, as well as the things that encourage us and build our faith.

The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to fan into flame the gift of God and to embrace His spirit of power, love and self-discipline. If you've ever tried to fan a spark into a flame you'll know it can take quite a bit of work and patience but it's very satisfying and fulfilling when you succeed. I sense God wants us to keep rolling up our sleeves and to push on. The vapour trails we're beginning to generate through our vision work are gradually becoming discernible and there is a general sense of direction emerging. We need to keep going because God wants us, to return to the sky imagery again but this time using Isaiah 40 (and so before aeroplanes) to soar on wings like eagles, with our hope firmly on the Lord. He doesn't want us to be all timid. A picture of us tip-toeing along on a tight rope comes to mind where we are all afraid of falling off or swaying the rope. This is not what Jesus had in mind for us. The Lord sent Jesus so we can each have a full and fulfilling life (John 10:10) and the only way we are going to achieve this is by really flapping our wings as eagles need to as they hunt out the thermals so they can soar. We are just beginning to catch the thermals and so must not give up.

With all this mind, and the sermon I preached on 8 January about turning up the spiritual temperature of the nation, I feel really excited about the year ahead and the freedom God wants us each, and as a church, to experience. I don't believe we have any idea yet of the real freedom we can each have in Christ. I think the vision areas can help us with this if we really engage with, and invest in, them. This doesn't mean everyone being involved in all of them. We each need to be asking God where He wants us to be involved but I am convinced there is a role for everyone.

However, the Tools for the Job vision area is a little different because this is for everyone. This is about equipping us for our journeys and becoming better and more effective disciples (as well as going and making disciples). This is relevant to everyone. It is about us becoming more intimate with Jesus and learning to imitate Him better. To this end, we shall be continuing with looking at the Gifts of the Holy Spirit during the year. Jesus used the gifts and He offers them to us. Jesus' life also demonstrated the fruits of the Spirit so we shall be looking again at these later in the year. I also want us to spend some time looking at the personality of Jesus because if we are made in His image then our personalities, varied as they are, should reflect His! So we'll be looking, for instance, at the playfulness of Jesus, His fierce intention, His extravagant generosity, His disruptive honesty, His scandalous freedom, His cunning and humility, among others. I'm hoping this will be really exciting, powerful and transforming for us. I'm certainly really excited about it.

I would like to thank everyone at Trinity for being co-travellers. We are really blessed to have each other. So many of you play key roles in the life of Trinity and at the start of 2012 my thanks go out to you. One of my on-going prayers for Trinity is that we'll each be open to being used by God for His Kingdom purposes and that He'll raise up the right people for the right tasks. Please would you join me in this prayer? I've got this picture of us all as young eagles in the sky circling round seeking out the thermals – a wonderful image, and one that I believe brings joy to the Lord.

This is the kind of letter that you write and re-write (well, I do!) because there is so much that could be included and you need to get the tone just right and so on. I've gone for aeroplanes, vapour trails and flapping eagles because I sensed God telling me to. I hope I've got this right. I realise I might have mis-heard God! Another thing I'm praying for, which I'd also love you to join me in, is that we can really see, in the course of 2012, the Holy Spirit breaking out among us and anointing us and then, as this happens, we give each other permission to try out the Spiritual gifts and to know that it's okay if we make a mistake (any sort of mistake of course, not just relating to the Spiritual gifts). Having a culture that encourages us to have a go but is really forgiving is so special and is the model Jesus has shown us!

None of us know what lies ahead. Thankfully we don't go it alone. We can support and care for each other and we have Jesus. I don't know what 2012 looks like for you. It may well look tough. My, and Jo's prayers for you and all of us at Trinity is that God will bless each of us no matter what and that Christ's vapour trail will stand out more clearly than ever to the world around because we have been obedient to Him.

Yours in Christ,

Jon S

PS. In past annual letters I've always addressed them personally. This year I'm wanting to send out as many as possible by email so please forgive me for not doing this this year.