

For the display of his splendour

Yesterday at a church meeting, I asked "What is the vision for the church?"

Today, as I was digging in my garden, I was pondering people's responses, including my own. Then words came to my spirit that cut through all my thinking and every opposition:

"For the display of his [God's] splendour." The scripture is in Isaiah 61:3.

It is as simple as that and as hard as that.

Simple because it has nothing to do with personal preferences, style of worship, format of services, ministries, personal desire to be used or recognised, history and tradition. People may say, "Yes but I like our service to be structured." No, for the display of his splendour. "Yes, but I like freedom of worship." No, for the display of his splendour. "We welcome people and they like us." No, for the display of his splendour. "We do this and we do that." No, for the display of his splendour. "We owe it to those who have gone before us." No, for the display of his splendour.

For the display of *his* splendour. God's splendour.

It is as hard as that. Why? Because we have to get ourselves out of the way. Our preferences, our prejudices, our reputations, our pride, our self-satisfaction, our gifts, our experiences, our training, our qualifications, our positions, our desire for fulfilment and recognition, our denominational identity or lack of it, our desire to please people. Our very selves. And that is hard, very hard.

There is only one way to display God's splendour: to allow the Holy Spirit to do his work and to lead us. The Holy Spirit is not some bolt-on accessory to God and Christian life. The Holy Spirit is God. In the same way that Jesus said "I and my Father are one," Jesus and the Holy Spirit are one. The Holy Spirit is not a power or a force, he is a person. If the Holy Spirit is not at work, everything we do is a waste of time and everything we do brings glory to ourselves not to God. The church is designed to display God's splendour.

Isaiah 61 should be our vision:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour. Isaiah 61: 1-3 (NIV)

Jesus read out the first part from a scroll and declared that it had been fulfilled in him. The second part is the fruit of the work of Jesus: those who have received the good

news, been set free, comforted, healed, lifted up, delivered, changed are intended to be for the display of God's splendour. We are intended to be the representation of God to the world, his finest advertising campaign, to draw people to him in a relationship with him, not with an organisation.

Last night when I chewed over the attitudes that had been revealed in the meeting and then prayed for the Holy Spirit to come, the wind, the water and the fire of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit said to me, "*They [unbelievers] are going to have to see it in action.*" Words on their own are not going to convince anybody. The challenge to me is to be doing what the Holy Spirit enables so that people see him, know Jesus and receive him. The finger points at me to change first.