

Good morning Church!

It only took 9 months, but I'm preaching 😊. I was sitting in the congregation 2 weeks ago and was quite nervous about this morning about what Brian described about preaching

"What is scary is the responsibility of preaching the word of God. I have this underlying conviction that a sermon should be worth the congregation's time. I, and I know each of our regular preachers here at OBC, work hard to provide messages that are well-constructed, well-illustrated, packed with Biblical truth and hopefully inspired by God.

So that's been ticking through my mind as I prepared for this morning. I pray that as we work together through some ideas today that God will speak to us, and that you will be encouraged, inspired, helped, motivated, comforted, disciplined, matured, taught and entertained. Let's see if I can fit it all in 😊.

So some of you might not know much about me. I'm Declan Smith, 25 years old. Married to Melissa, on Pastoral staff here, with the main responsibility to oversee and lead the direction of our Worship here at OBC. I've been here in this role since the end of January.

It's been a really interesting journey so far. One of the key goals for me in this first year coming into a new church, was to assess and assimilate into our culture, to align myself with the vision and specific focus of the church, to plan, to cast ideas and vision, to seek God for the way ahead for OBC in my responsibilities to oversee our worship ministry. There has been so much for me to try and absorb and ponder as I consider the way ahead for us as a team who lead our congregation in worship.

What our worship Leaders do on a Sunday morning is a hard task. Probably one of the hardest in church. I personally appreciate all the work they do as they prepare and lead us each Sunday. Can we just appreciate them for a moment?

The reason Worship leading is sometime so hard is because what we define for Sunday morning "worship" is such a hot zone in churches. More modern songs, to more hymns, too quiet, too loud, to expressive, to emotional, too bland, To sad, too happy, drums are from the devil, choir music is so

boring....etc etc. And of course on of the biggies, is worship just singing? Shouldn't we worship god with our whole lives? Cant everything we do be an act of worship?

Everyone has an opinion. And to an extent, everyone opinion on their worship has value. God has made us all in his likeness, and each of our individual tastes and expressions of love form part of gods design for our worship to him. Some love to paint, some love to meditate on scripture, on in nature. Different sights and sounds remind different people of the goodness of God, and inspire their praise and edification of him.

This is what is interesting about my role. I'm not here to simply impart my vision, my way of doing things. I could, but we would go down the road of so many churches all around the world. 'Hey someone did this thing, it must be what we need to do too. Lets copy and paste Hillsong, or Bethel, Or vineyard, or equippers, or Planetshakers, etc etc etc'. And then the inevitable happens which is that very few end up happy, the worship of the church becomes dull and . Copy and pasting someone else's ideas into a different culture and context just doesn't work. David shared that story a few weeks ago of how one of the preachers he was travelling with had no idea that what he was speaking on wouldn't work in the culture where they were. Interpretation of context and culture is vital. So I'm not here to copy and paste what I'm used to. I'm here to inspire OBC's worship, to bring out the worshipper of OBC. To encourage the heart and vision and soul of OBC amongst us. To discern gods voice for our churches worship.

But here has been my struggle since I've gotten here.

Who are we as OBC? If we boil it down, past all the preferences, past all the opinions, past all the suggestions of style and taste and demographic. we come to 3 simple identity markers. Our Vision, Our values and our Dream. Brian spoke about some of these last week, who has any idea what they are? Our Dream? Our vision? Our Values? What are these? – talk amongst yourselves.

Live Love Learn Lead.

We are Followers of Jesus, Family, Missional, People of Grace

Imagine Statements

These identity markers serve 2 purposes. 1, they tell newcomers who we are (or strive to be). 2, they remind us of who we are striving to be. We are forgetful people. It's our human nature to forget. If you have forgotten who we are as OBC, please read these statements. I feel like in need to have my walls covered with these as I go about my day, to constantly remind me of what we are about, so that I don't get stuck in the rut of doing the week to week, but keep my eyes above the waves to see who we are and where we need to be going.

So despite our identity markers being simple and straight forward, its still a lot of information. So if we were to really boil it down, really refine the gold from the dross, what do we get? If you had to describe the purpose of OBC in as few words as possible, what would you say?....

I think its Matthew 28 16, the great commission. Who we are as OBC is to tell others about what we have already discovered. The grace and love of Christ. To help people take one step closer to Jesus.

So this is what I've been pondering. How do I reconcile what my role is, to direct and engage the worshipping hearts of OBC, with who we are, as a family gathering of local missionaries? How does our personal/ and more importantly our corporate worship response reflect who and what we are actually about as a family. How does our worship response reconcile with our call to the lost. Do we even need worship (in the sense of what we do here corporately on a Sunday)? Can't we just "worship God with our whole lives" by fulfilling his mission, and our identity as OBC, without having to do it on a Sunday morning, by singing songs that no doubt someone won't like and wont connect with, or enacting in different spiritual disciplines that seem a bit like religious rote?

I've struggled with this question for months? It's quite a compelling argument. And has brought internal questions for me about the legitimacy of my role. What does my role as a Worship Pastor look like in the reality of our Mission-centred church as OBC. I've had to keep going back to what I know of God, and what I know of myself.

Because despite my internal conversation, I know our worship response is crucial to our personal and corporate relationship with God. The bible is full of worship, Pages and pages of songs reminding the worshippers of what He has done for them. Books and books of biblical narrative, giving us stories and testimony of the goodness of god through his works, in creation, in his redemption of our lives through Christ. The inspired word of God, the bible, is inspired worship. That's what tells me we have to worship. We don't get to opt out. We don't get to go about our lives 'honouring god' without taking corporate moments to praise and honour and edify our King.

And my experience of those corporate worship moments has taught me a few things.

My worship experience has been the greatest influence on my Theology. I can read scripture all day, and do my very best to understand more of God through it, and I do. But as the average layman has so few tools for correct interpretation that sometimes we just get lost in it.

Good songs that speak of the nature of God, catch in our Mind. Just like a good add that we can't get the jingle out of our head, a good worship song can do the same, and as it runs over and over in our head, imparts that truth into us. That was the whole purpose of hymns. Some of the hymn writers took pub songs, familiar, catchy tunes, and laced them with scripture. And those songs gave people with little to no access to scripture, a means of growing their understanding of God, their Theology. Now reflecting on nature gives us greater understanding of God too, his love of beauty, his care of all things, from the smallest to the greatest. Taking communion, amongst other things, teaches us that God is a sustainer. Out of our worship, comes a large part of our understanding of God, and our relationship with him. So that's one reason why its crucial.

We have been working our way through the book of Acts, we've called it "ACTS-the church on a mission. We have explored the context and how God used his people to spread the message of the gospel to the known world. And a few weeks ago David Shared about the key moment in Acts, where the strategy of the church specifically turned toward sending people out in Mission. Let's have another look:

“ In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13: 1-3 NIV)

So the key moment, the once in which the mission of God was directed deliberately to his people, the church, just happened. While they were worshipping the lord and Fasting, the Holy spirit spoke to them and told them what to do.

Our specific call comes through inspired worship. We could debate whether they are seeking God's direction or just worshipping God. Either way, we must understand that they found God's direction for their lives through sincerely worshipping God.

And that takes us back to who we are. If we want to live out our identity as OBC, we need that revelation, and as we worship god, engaging in spiritual disciplines, he WILL speak to us and give us direction on where to fulfil his mission.

So we go out. Our worship has been a great help in teaching us who God is, and through it, God has inspired us and given us direction for our mission. So then we go out and do it!

Here is the challenge, we forget. The exodus is a prime example. God has just delivered them from Egypt, through miraculous signs wonders and deliverance. This wasn't small things that they might forget, this was big. Rivers running in Blood, Darkness during the day, firstborn instantaneously being struck down, and then a flight across dry land with a sea split on either side. Plumes of cloud during the day, Fire at night, Bread that falls from heaven, water out of rocks! It was huge! Yet the Israelites turn around and worship a golden cow that they made. Then they had to wander in the desert, because they could trust that god would give them the land that he had promised them. The God who had done all that! No we will just wander and Die in the desert, he can't do this for us.

It happens so many times in 1st and second Kings. The king remembers the goodness of God and does what is right, the next one doesn't. Back and forth, back and forth. God knows that his people quickly forget, and turn away.

That's another critical reason for worship. It reminds us of what we already know of God. It keeps us in step with what we know of God, and helps us fight the easy road to just forget and stop believing in who God is and what He can do.

I remember some of the tough times I have had in my life. I remember the endless nights where we worried about immigration paperwork for Melissa. At one stage we were days away from her being an overstayer. I remember the days of us freaking out over leaving our home in Pukekohe to move to Tauranga. Was it the right decision, were we crazy. Surely God wouldn't deliver and provide for us?

In those days it was testifying of what he has done for me that made the difference. I recounted every time he had pulled through for me, every time he delivered on his promises despite my unbelief. It gave me the faith to know that amidst uncertainty, what I knew of God hadn't changed. As I worshiped him by testifying his acts, I was refreshed in the knowledge of who he was and how much he loved me.

When we testify, be it in word or in song, it reminds our hearts of who God is. It breaks the cycle of returning unbelief. It brings fresh revelation of old, forgotten truths. For those who struggle with fear, how reviving it is to sing "I'm no longer a slave to fear, I am a Child Of God", or "you're a good good father, it's who you are, And I am loved by you, It's who I am" the psalmists of our day are writing great words that are needed for the current world. Giving identity to a world that is searching for its identity. Pointing the source of love to a world that is desperately reaching for love, but unable to find it amongst all the pleasures of this world. One of my commitments to this church is to continue to introduce songs that speak to what our world, and ourselves, need reminding of. No matter how many times we hear it, we constantly need that reminder of his grace, his love for us. And a generation that may not connect with the melodies of 18th century pub songs, still need that reminder also. We have to constantly reframe the same messages, in order to keep reminding the

people who God is, because if we hear the same message the same way, it would eventually lose its value. Just as the Israelite's ignored God despite the fact there was a pillar of cloud right there, and a mountain shrouded in smoke with the very presence of Him, familiar words and tunes that speak vital truth, can so easily be sung without being nourished at all by that truth, directly because it's too familiar. New ways of expressing the same things about God keep us reminded of what we already know, but may have forgotten

When we remember we are refreshed.

So that's me! That's what I've been thinking and praying over since I started in this role.

How do I direct our worship to inspire what we know of God, and increase that understanding and vocabulary

How do I give space for the Holy Spirit to speak and inspire you to the mission of God

How do I create moments for you to be refreshed and reminded of who God is and what he has done.