

6 Calling God's people to celebrate!

AIMS:

- To realise that it's all right to be OTT for God! (OTT = Over the top)
- To consider the importance of sensitivity to beauty and innovation to create meaningful celebration of God's goodness.
- To explore different ways of celebrating God's goodness to us.
- To stretch ourselves so that we step outside our comfort zone in celebrating God in our lives.

BEFOREHAND – ask someone to prepare the Revelation reading.

MUSIC:

Start with a couple of songs of celebration to God. That's what we are here for! Choose from the list of suggested songs or some of your own choosing.

OPENING PRAYER

Creator Spirit, come,
Renew the face of the earth.
Kindling Spirit, come,
Inflame our waiting hearts.
Anointing Spirit, come,
Pour forth on us anew.

You led your people by a cloud
May your Spirit lead us all today
You led your people by fire at night
May your Spirit lighten up our way
Wind of God, blow us to wild places as you will
Breeze of God, refresh us as you desire
Breath of God, blow away all that is unclean
Rain of God, revive our withered lives
River of God, flow through us and heal our land
River of God, flow through us and heal our land

Community of Aidan & Hilda

MEDITATION

Invite people to close their eyes and listen to Revelation 7:9-12 as it is read slowly. Remain in silence; picture the scene; imagine the sound of so many voices; have you heard that kind of worship?

DISCUSSION STARTER:

How have members of the group celebrated recently? (Anniversaries; successes: significant events)

What did they do to celebrate? Was there any unusual or any religious dimension to the celebration? **F/C**

What kind of things trigger in you a sense or feeling of wonder, thankfulness and praise? Is it in lyrics and music of songs, the beauty and wonder of nature or services of worship such as communion? Is it in the simple things or the amazing complexity of God's creation?

Share with each other.

READINGS: (for background)

- 2 Samuel 6:12-23
- Psalm 33:1-22
- Psalm 48

Break into groups if there are enough members.

Find out why God is being praised in each passage, and in addition think about the following:

2 Samuel: verse 13 which is totally OTT! Imagine how you would have felt as one of those in the procession.

Think about leaders (church leaders; state leaders...) doing as David did. Explore how you would feel if they did. Would you have a sneaking sympathy for Michal's point of view?

Have you ever had your heart filled to bursting with thankfulness and praise.....Are we like King David..... do we find something stopping us?

Psalm 33: the number of times the idea of 'joy' and 'trust' is/are expressed. Are the two linked, do you think?

Psalm 48: can you share any experiences of times when God has rescued or protected **you?** **F/C**

Record all the reasons expressed in all four passages for praising God: His attributes; His deeds...

MEDITATION

What does it mean to CELEBRATE?

Our world seems to be able to celebrate things with abandon, organising huge festivals, events, fireworks, music, singing & dancing. Have we in the Church forgotten how to celebrate? It's easy to stay in the comfort of what we know and the routines that are familiar. It's very hard to step outside our comfort zones and show God our true hearts. What will people think of us? What will **God** think of us?

God joins in laughter – (Genesis 21;6, Job 8;21): he commanded joyful feasts, in Church! (Deuteronomy 12;4-8)

PRAYER TIME

either...list on a flip chart as each person thinks of something that happened yesterday, for which (s)he can be thankful now, and look at them while the leader offers a prayer on behalf of all;

or...have a time of prayer for people to offer their own words of thanks, maybe sharing in twos.

A CHALLENGE

There's no tried and tested formula for celebration. There's no recipe. There's no **right** way. We need to start celebrating God in the little things, in our every day lives. Making space in our hearts on those mad and busy days to stop and thank God for His goodness.

"There are very few people
who realise what God would make of them
if they abandoned themselves into his hands,
and let themselves be formed by his grace." (St Ignatius)

The secret is to start with a right heart and right motives before God. He knows us inside out. He invites us to be open to Him, and to take up His challenge, of risking all we are in order to live in His way. We often limit what God can do for us and with us because we are afraid to take a step of faith into the unknown. It's scary, but God promises He will always be with us. God wants us to celebrate Him. And He wants **all** of us to celebrate Him. No exceptions!!

Ask for the grace to trust yourself totally to God's love. If we do this, it becomes easier to live our lives for God "on the edge". We become empowered to try new things in celebrating our God. God loves it when we become excited for Him. Let's think outside the box! Think of the adventure in store for us! Celebrating and living on the edge with God!

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT:

In the reading from 2 Samuel, Michal is critical of King David's exuberant celebration of God's goodness and from then on remained barren. What symbolism do you see in this? What might this be saying to the Church?

DISCUSSION/BRAINSTORMING: F/C

- What new ways can we celebrate God's touch in our lives personally? Has someone experienced healing, support, new life? Why not throw a party? How can you make it special
 - Are there milestones or achievements we could celebrate in this Church? Brainstorm ideas and make plans to be creative in celebrating God's goodness in this Church.
- Is there a reason to hold a celebration soon, in this Church? Perhaps something has happened in the community that could be linked to a celebration.

How could we bring celebration back into our services of worship?

Some ideas to get you started:

- Write a psalm of praise for use in next Sunday's worship.

See chapter 4 "Integrity"

- List the opportunities for celebration in this church: milestones, achievements, both personal and corporate
- Plan a day of celebration – e.g. worship that involves all the senses; lunch; what else might be appropriate/possible? (Invite the community to join in?)
- Look at your hymn book(s) and pick something with words that mean something to you; learn the tune and use it in church. (Repeat this exercise as often as you like!!)
- Telling the stories of Jesus rather than reading them
- Making banners
- Guided reflections with instrumental music in background
- Drama
- Dance and movement – it's not just for the young people!
- Planning festive all age services to celebrate God's creation, Christmas, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, Harvest Thanksgiving
- Try a new hymn or song each week – be radical!

Think about why we do some of the things we do in Church and think about how to make them more relevant to the 21st century.

Remember it's not about performance but about right hearts. Think about how to involve all ages from children right through to the more senior members of your congregation.

ACTIVITY:

Do some celebrating that is a bit OTT!

Idea; Invite your community to an evening or day event and have a BBQ / Lunch so you can meet them – no strings attached!

BLESSINGS:

God give us rain when we expect sun.
Give us music when we expect trouble.
Give us tears when we expect breakfast.
Give us dreams when we expect a storm.
Give us a stray dog when we expect congratulations.
God play with us, turn us sideways and around.
Amen.

Michael Leunig

OR:

Leader: Wherever you call us, Lord, our God,
All: ***we want to be ready and willing to go.***

Leader: Whenever you need us, Lord, our God,
All: ***we want to be available and attentive.***

Leader: Whoever turns out to be our neighbour in need,
All: ***we want to be happy to serve, without exceptions.***

Leader: Live within us, Lord our God,
All: ***so that we notice with your discernment,
respond with your compassion,
and speak with your integrity.
In our lives and in our world,
let your kingdom come.
Amen.***

Susan Sayers

MUSIC:

- "Days of Elijah" – Robin Mark (©1996 Daybreak Music Ltd)
- "Revival" – Robin Mark (©1998 Daybreak Music Ltd)
From the album – REVIVAL IN BELFAST
- "You're Good Lord" – Kathryn Scott
(©2003 Vertical Worship Songs)
From the album – SATISFY
- "I Love The Lord" – New Irish Choir & Orchestra
From the album – THE CELEBRATION ALBUM by Evangelical Ministries
- "O For A Thousand Tongues"
- "Be Thou My Vision"
- "Come On & Celebrate" –

RESOURCES:

- "The Celtic Resource Book" – Martin Wallace
- "The Dramatised Bible"

"The Message" What does it mean to CELEBRATE God in our lives?