

This is about Walking Together. As Pastor Steve said we've had a series on Walking the Talk: we had "Walking with Jesus", "Walking with Others", "Walking in the Spirit", "Walking in the Light", and now we're finishing with "Walking Together. I don't know if you know, but Christian life cannot be lived alone - we're in this together. So, we're reading from Ephesians chapter 4; Paul writes:

[Reading Ephesians 4:1-6] ("live a life" can also be translated "walk": "I urge you to walk worthy of the calling...")

[Continuing Reading Ephesians 11-16; 5:15-20] ("...how you life" or "how you walk")

Wonderful, wonderful passage!

I want to talk about the power of three things: The power of a Cup of Tea, The power of a House Church, and The power of Accountability.

The first thing: **The Power of a Cup of Tea.** Tony came up - Tony's our evangelism coordinator) - he came up and he spoke a couple of weeks ago about "Power Evangelism" which is healings, deliverance and that kind of thing, but you know, there's just as much power in a Cup of Tea? In having a conversation with somebody? People have so many mixed up things which prevent them from coming close to God and prevent them from accepting Jesus, and to be able to sit with someone over a cup of tea and let the Spirit work through you to do a little bit of heart surgery, or a little bit of brain surgery, to clear the blockages which prevent people from coming to God is just as powerful as to be able to lay hands on someone and heal them. Did you know that? It's absolutely true.

There was a couple in the Bible called Priscilla and Aquila - they were married: Priscilla was the wife, Aquila is the husband. They were one of the most famous couples in the Bible - they appear in four different books; they appear in Acts, they appear in Romans, they appear in I Corinthians and they appear in I Timothy. We don't know how they got saved, but they travelled out of Rome when it was in persecution and they travelled to Greece, and at some point they met Paul and they met another gentleman called Apollos. And Apollos is somebody who's mentioned in I Corinthians as being someone who grew to be a leader in the church. But when Aquila and Priscilla met him his knowledge was incomplete, and that's the testimony of Scripture is that when he came to them his knowledge was incomplete and if he'd carried on teaching in that way he would have spread this incomplete teaching. But God brought him to Priscilla and Aquila so that Priscilla and Aquila together could fix that - set him straight so that then he could go out and continue that straight teaching.

They did the same with Paul, and that's why Paul mentions them so many times. But I want to say again from after we had the women, lovely women come up earlier on to speak about the house groups, it has to be men and women. In the Bible Priscilla is mentioned before him: seven times they're mentioned, Priscilla is mentioned first five of the seven times, and I think that's specifically because it was such a patriarchal and male focused society at the time, that Biblical writers wanted to make a point of putting her first so that she was just as important, if not more, at the time. But now it's almost flipped. We've got to a point where I think where perhaps the men need to step up just a little bit more because the women are carrying a lot of the load and the men

aren't getting together and we're not supporting each other, and we need to! If Aquila hadn't been there and it'd been just Priscilla they wouldn't have been able to talk to Apollos because it would have been right. Priscilla wouldn't have been able to take Apollos into her home and talk to him had it's just been her. It has to be men and women working together, it's got to be both.

I move to the second part: **The Power of a House Church**. I help out with the Parents and Toddlers which Janet McLaren runs on Fridays with the team, and a couple of the kids they like to bring up the bricks to me for some reason – I think they think I'm a big kid (because I am a big kid) – but they bring the bricks up and a couple of them are really funny: they start trying to build with one of these little-like rectangular blocks and then they start going up, but they only build on the one block. And do you know what happens when you only build on the one block: at some point it just goes <flump> and falls over; you need to have a couple of blocks, don't you, to get a bit of support.

But it doesn't have to be like the pyramid where it's everybody across the bottom and then going up to the top – that's not the picture of a church at all. You can do some amazing structures and some architects have built some fantastic structures where there's less steelwork at the bottom and then as it builds up: you've got a couple there, you've got a couple there, then you build across, and then you go up and up and up. And that's what the church is a picture of: you're building up. Paul spoke a couple of times in the Scriptures there about the church building up, being built up, building itself up. The church doesn't build downwards – it doesn't build down from the pastor, it builds up! The people who are running as the ministries here aren't here to build down, support structures down: it's physically impossible, you can't start at the top and then build down. Everything that's built is built up – it's true, isn't it?

The church was born in a house, in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem: 120 people had gathered together, they'd been told to wait, to wait for the Holy Spirit. As we sang this morning: "Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord", to tarry before the lord, and these 120 people: they weren't there for an hour and a half on a Sunday morning, they were there for days waiting, sharing songs, teaching, sharing words from the Lord, singing songs, praying together, and then eventually the Holy Spirit fell and the people went out. And they went out and formed smaller groups. And that was how the church again with built, and how the church spread because these smaller groups were able to then bring more people in. And when we hear in Acts about the church – the numbers been added to the church daily, 3,000 people in a day – it was only possible because you had all these units of people, these house churches, the power of a house church.

And in these groups what happened? Well the same things that we heard about happening in the house groups this morning: teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer; it's exactly what we do here on a Sunday morning. But why it's important it happens in the smaller groups is because it's intimidating to come here on a Sunday morning when there's 100 people and perhaps think I'm going to come up and share a word that the Lord's given me in the week. It's intimidating to pray before people (bless Denise and the young man here who prayed). But it's intimidating to pray before a room full of people; it's less intimidating to pray before 6 to 10 people. You can get more teaching delivered straight and at more time to discuss the teaching by sharing in a house church. You can fellowship and break bread at the same time, you can actually share a meal together – not just the bread and wine we do here – it's fantastic. This is the power of a house church.

And why it is so Important is because we see again the church was born in a house but the Holy Spirit wants to keep pouring out in these scenarios. Cornelius in Acts 10: his family had been

meeting exactly like this and they'd been sharing teaching. They are spoken of as a devout family. They were doing all these things and then Peter was told to come and visit the house: the Apostle Peter was told to come and even before he laid hands on the family the Holy Spirit came and fell on them because their hearts had been prepared. Where? In a house church. This is why it's so important. I firmly believe the Holy Spirit is wanting to pour out in these scenarios, in these meetings, and I don't mean specifically here – I mean in small groups. You might think I'm wrong but I think this is a picture of how the church is built and how the church grows.

So finally: **The Power of Accountability**. Did you know that when the Lord blesses you it's not for you! When a lord blesses you it's for somebody else. And likewise if you're in need don't think that you have to get yourself out of that need: you have to make that need known, because the Lord has blessed somebody else so that you can be that one that he blesses. And the power of Accountability is that we don't try to do this on our own. Again, you can't build upwards off the one. It's not just about you, it's about everybody coming together, it's about doing this together. When people come to the Faith it's a bit like when you make New Year's resolutions: you make a list of the things that you want to do, but most people when they make New Year's resolutions they fall away from them because there's nobody holding them accountable.

And when people first come to faith if they don't get plugged into these smaller groups or these little couple of people, three, four people who you can be intimate with expressing your doubts, expressing your needs, expressing your fears, but also sharing a blessing and receiving from these people so that they can build you up. Just as Priscilla and Aquila built up Apollos so that he could become a pillar in the church, you need to be plugged into a group so that people can build you up, so that you can become a pillar in a church. And if you're not in that situation at the moment, get into that, because the Lord desires to do that through you. It's necessary for a church to keep being built – church hasn't finished being built: are we mature in the faith yet? Have we come to the fullness of Christ? I don't think that we have! Therefore we need to keep still doing these things together, walking together.

I've got a couple of slides I just wanted to share.

When people come to the Faith the most important thing for them to hear about is not their sin but the Grace of God and the Grace of Christ. Relationships that help us the most are partnerships that help us focus more and more on Christ, not on our sin. You need to be accountable to somebody not so that they can make you feel bad for the things that you've done, but so that they can encourage you when you are down. We all desperately need that, and when we don't have that we're much more likely to fall. We need people that can help us, encourage us, feed into us and build us up. But we also need people who can encourage us to press on, and press on in the Faith. Grace doesn't cancel out our responsibility or accountability for the things God has given us to do. You've been called to something, you've been called to a specific purpose. Do you know what that is? And if you don't know what that is, it might be because you haven't been checking in with the people who can possibly tell you.

I got my calling and had my calling affirmed in a house group, because the people affirmed the call upon my life and they encouraged me to start serving in certain ministries, and if they hadn't done that I wouldn't be standing here today, I wouldn't have taken the necessary steps. God has called you to a ministry as well. You have a responsibility to live that out, to ask him what it is, to ask the people around you what it is. So that you can move on, and so you can move other people on to maturity – maturity doesn't come with age, maturity comes with an acceptance of responsibility. Maturity comes with an acceptance of responsibility. We all, every single one of us, need to

accept our responsibility for each other.

Help each other.

That's Christian living.

Thank you.