



'Everyone gets to Play' Creating a Culture of **engagement**
'Come as you are' Creating a Culture of **Radical Welcome**
'Follow me' Creating a Culture of **discipleship**
'Give it away' Creating a Culture of **generosity**
'Play nicely' Creating a Culture of **honour**
'Before an audience of 1' Creating a Culture of **worship**
'Leadership = influence' Creating a Culture of **blessing**

Cultivate #1: 'Everyone gets to Play' Creating a Culture of engagement

Spring is here and with it comes growth. And with growth comes some gardening tasks of weeding, pruning, planting, supporting and tending. Weeds I don't want so I pull them out. But there are also some plants that I'm not that keen on, or they're in the wrong place so they get moved. Some plants I like so I care for them, water them, feed them and prune them. And other plants I want so I sow seeds and grow them.

Gardening is all about what God is doing through nature, and the garden has a mind of it's own, and conditions that prevail as well. But I have input and shape this process.

In church it is the same. All of what goes on is a combination of people, God, local conditions and the stuff life throws at us. But God has given us a vision and a calling, and also given us the responsibility to steward it all – so the gardening analogy is very apt. we aren't in control, he is. And where people and the unpredictability of life is thrown in that adds more random factor for us to contend with. But there are things we can do and actions that we can take that will shape the garden and bring added growth and health.

So what is it that we want to grow, encourage, feed and sow into?

This series is all about the culture we are intentionally growing here at Plymouth Vineyard. Part of it has its roots in the Vineyard family of churches, and the **values** that have grown up to be central to it. Part is what we are **called** to as a local church here in 21st century Plymouth. Part will be **historical** – what we've grown up to look like. All will be rooted in the **Bible** and what we feel God's word teaches us to be. So let's start with God's word found in 1 Corinthians 12...

[1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 21-31](#)

The first of our top 7 cultural values is summed up in the phrase 'Everyone gets to Play' Creating a Culture of engagement.

The job of being church is the responsibility of all of the church. What is inferred in our passage today – that the church is like a body and it has many parts all at work collectively, with no one member being more important or indispensable than the other – is made clear in another verse found in 1 Peter 2:5 that says 'you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.'

We are all priests. We all together have the job of dispensing the ministry of the church – **namely: preaching the gospel, healing the sick, caring for each other and caring for the poor.** Using the spiritual gifts in the process.

So what culture do we find ourselves in and is it one we are happy with? Or do we want to become counter-cultural – even within the church – in the sort of church we are creating here at PVC?

And once we've decided what culture we want to create, how do we go about creating and establishing it, and where are the pain points going to come?

To understand where we are at with that, and the challenges we face, I think it would be helpful to set today in 21st century Plymouth in the context of history.

History lesson

33AD Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Sometimes known as the Birthday of the Church. From here the newly emboldened, envisioned and equipped disciples go about doing church. What did it look like? Small groups and dinner parties basically. And regular visits to the synagogue because they were still observing their Jewish customs.

Next – they were scattered because of persecution – that meant that many Jewish observances were dropped – particularly commitment to temple worship – and lots of churches were planted. In other words just like with us 15 years ago – a family would find themselves in a new city, would tell people about Jesus, do some signs and wonders and a small church would be formed.

This was the pattern for the next 300 years: small groups and gatherings, leaders trained on the job and through the scriptures as they became gathered and copied, bouts of persecution where Christians would be attacked or imprisoned, and everyone carrying out the ministry of the church **preaching the gospel, healing the sick, caring for each other and caring for the poor.** Using the spiritual gifts in the process.

312AD Roman emperor Constantine (pagan) receives a vision of a flaming cross with the words '*In hoc signo vinces*': 'By this sign conquer'. He defeats rival Maxentius at the Battle of Milvian Bridge. He duly made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, and everything changed. Christianity became popular, and not necessarily for the right reasons. People started paying church leaders and building big church buildings. The money for this came from an additional tax that everyone had to pay, and becoming a priest, as church leaders began to be called, was all of a sudden a career move. The church gained power and influence and wealth.

Mix people with power, money and influence and what do you get? Corruption.

It didn't all happen with Constantine, but it happened as a result of Constantine's decision to make Christianity part of the institution.

As Groucho Marx said; 'Marriage (substitute church) is a great institution but who wants to spend their life in an institution?'

So we went from small groups of people quite informally organised, subverting the culture and the political powers through their actions of loving the poor, helping the needy and worshipping the Lord together, spreading the gospel of peace often in a state of persecution (so there was a high cost) and multiplying through planting out new churches and new leaders – to having big churches, men in dresses, paid leaders, a power structure within the church that was very similar to outside of it, and architecture in the churches that put the leaders at the front doing the business and the plebs down there where they belong and where they can't mess it up.

We even have an altar rail which initially grew up to protect the sacrament from abuse – often by dogs, which were a common addition to services in medieval times.

And it all became about the service in the church (rather than the service to the world).

Attendance at mass was the indicator of your faith, although there were many times and places where attendance became compulsory.

Fast forward to 1517 - Martin Luther posts his 95 Theses in Wittenburg, Germany; beginning the Protestant reformation. Protesting against religious corruption and other things (95 of them actually). Scripture was still in Latin so the average Joe didn't really have a clue what was going on except what the priest told him (and that was mostly about behaviour). The church was then Catholic and Protestant, and for protestant we had a number of different beliefs, expressions and types, according to their interpretation of the bible, which began to be set free through different translations.

1525 - William Tyndale completes his translation of the Bible into English.

Lots of these returned to the concept of every member ministry (in fact one of Luther's 95 theses was the priesthood of all believers that came from the 1 Peter quote at the start) and small informal groups studying the word, doing life together and worshipping.

In England this didn't happen to quite the same extent. In fact it rather seems that we just swapped the catholic church set up for one that was protestant but had a hierarchy of bishops, priests and laity, with the head of the church changing from the pope to Henry VIII. This happened in 1534, largely in order to facilitate his divorce.

So did the church change much? Well it cleaned up its act, apart from some very corrupt church leaders who cropped up now and again, some brutal torture and murder of witches, heretics and people who don't share their beliefs. But essentially the structure and culture of pre-reformation church remained the same for many.

But interestingly where the Holy Spirit broke out and thousands of people got saved, healings became common and the power of God was very evident – during these seasons church broke out of its formal meetings-based structure and it started to look more like the pre-constantine times, but there seems to be a drift back to big buildings, man at the front in charge and everyone else sitting behaving themselves.

Take the Wesleyan revival in the 1700s – Wesley was kicked out of church because of what was going on so he convened meetings wherever he could – often in fields. And the strength of the revival's longevity was in the system of small groups and 1:1 mentoring that went on. This was called a method, from which we get the word Methodism. Now would you say that the defining feature of Methodist churches nowadays is their system of small groups and 1:1 discipleship?

Drift

What we see at work here is drift. Have you ever been swimming where there is a current in the water? You go in, splash around and before you know it you are 20yds along the beach. You have drifted. You have to consciously and intentionally move the opposite way just to remain in the same place.

In life we have a number of drifts operating, depending on your personality and character. In the Church it is the same. One such drift is towards dead religion, rules and control of people. It is also towards money, power and corruption.

Bring it down to a local level and I think a drift is towards our history of congregation as audience and leader as performer, and it being all about Sunday meetings where we arrive, get fed and go home again with just enough spiritual sustenance to get us through the week.

So what is the alternative? What are we trying to create here?

Let's go to the Bible – this specific passage in 1 Corinthians, but also the whole picture that the gospels and the letters create, and modelled for us in the way the early church went about changing the world.

1. We form a body – diversity (different parts, different functions) and unity (held together by our common love of Christ and the ministry of the HS). **Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.**
2. We have responsibility – who's job is it to pastor? All of ours. Who's job is it to pray for the sick to be healed? Yours. We need to adopt a mindset for our meetings where we prepare beforehand – as opposed to turning up in receiver mode. Who is in the habit of taking time out before church on a Sunday or Life Group midweek, and reflecting, praying, dialling up. Lord what would you have me bring today? Who will I be looking out for? What are you saying? **1 Corinthians 14:26 What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.**
3. We have opportunity – our passage says eagerly desire the gifts. Gifts are tools for a job. Not trophies for the mantelpiece to look at and admire but never use. So what do you love doing? What gets you excited? When you look around and see a gap in church and it frustrates you – is that the HS prompting you to step up and get stuck in? What if the ministry, effectiveness and blessing of this church depending on you playing your part? Be it worship leading, serving coffee, joining a life group and loving the people there, whatever – this passage tells us that your calling could be big or small, but they're all vital, and all equally valuable, deserving of equal honour.

I was speaking to a life group leader recently who had someone join their group who comes every week, and if they said: 'I'll always be here, but if I'm not able to come I will always let you know.' Small thing but such a blessing to these leaders, and as a result the group is flourishing.

So this morning I want to concentrate on that element – the opportunity and the invitation.

This talk is an invitation to get up from the pews, reject 1700 years of church history and the culture it has created, and embrace your calling as followers of Jesus and ministers of the gospel. You are the prayer team, the welcome team, the pastoral team, the emerging leaders, the life group leaders, the compassion ministry, the evangelists – to use Paul's metaphor the leg, arm, ear, elbow...

Our vision, our beating heart, our calling and what gets me excited when I get up in the morning is to help all of us grasp a sense of our identity – our divine, royal sonship and daughtership – and flowing out of knowing how much we are loved and the power of what he has placed inside us connect with God's vision and calling for our life – specific to you and also fitting snugly into our shared vision and calling as a body. Sometimes it needs a bit of wrestling, sometimes we get it wrong or it doesn't seem to flow to begin with, but stick with it. And then we want to coach each other and encourage each other as we step out into that calling.

And how do 100 different people, different personalities and passions, all work together in harmony? That's God's job – he's on it – all over it in fact. It's the body again. It just works, but we can't construct it or control it.

There is more power in the pew than in the pulpit, and its time we unleashed that power. My job is helping it all blend together, coaching and encouraging people as they step out, take risks and grow.

And where does most of it happen? Out there. Where are the church ministers most of the time? In secular jobs. In neighbourhoods. In families. In friendships. That's where we spend our time. That's where church happens.

See how church history and tradition works against what Jesus had set up? In the past (and now actually) all the emphasis is on meetings, and a disconnect grew up between most of your life (out there) and faith. And the ultimate promotion in church for the best ones was to stop being in the world and come and work for the church as a leader. Running around like a blue***** fly getting burnt out doing (or not doing but trying to) all the jobs that are actually the responsibility and calling of all of us!

What are the barriers?

1. Drift – away from active participation and towards disengagement. Back to how it was.
2. Conflict – as we move into a committed and active role in church we will come into conflict, and our stuff will come up. We are family, and we all carry baggage. If we are in a safe place and getting to know people deeply then it will surface. Don't be afraid of this but work with it, because Jesus is making us whole and healing us. It's good, if painful.
3. Fear of failure – or real actual failure. We learn from our mistakes and the thing about being in relationship through a Life Group we can learn in that safe place and receive help when we get it wrong. We say here that if you are not making mistakes you are not being obedient to the call to get stuck in and try.
4. Busy-ness – when Jesus calls you he calls you to himself, to his cause and to his church. If you are to follow that call to participate in his divine work of the Kingdom it is a real privilege but it requires sacrifice. For some that sacrifice may come in the form of cutting some things out of your very busy lives in order to make room for God's work. Be honest, be real, be kind to yourself but be intentional. I don't want anyone getting to heaven, looking back on their lives and thinking; 'Where did all the time go? It's flown by and that quieter day that was just round the corner when I was going to give more time to God's work never came.' That quieter season just around the corner is a myth people. It never arrives.
5. The pain threshold – the gap between a need arising and someone being called to step in and see to it. Especially if I can do it. That's why being bi-vocational is so healthy for me. Lots of non-essential stuff I just can't do.