



God is for all Nations

***“for my house will be called a
house of prayer for all nations”***

INTRODUCTION

“I distinctly recall the opening worship of a church leadership conference I attended several years ago. It was akin to the opening ceremony of the Olympics, where every nation is represented and celebrated. We were invited to sing, ‘How Great is Our God’ in our mother tongue or whatever language we preferred. The familiar melody was the same but there was a great symphony of different languages singing the words in unison, with arms raised high; it was an incredible sight and sound to behold. There was something so powerful and beautiful in seeing hundreds of church leaders, from many different nations and church backgrounds, all together in one room, of one accord, worshipping the same God. The presence of the Holy Spirit was so tangible. We had a glimpse of heaven in that moment and were reminded of the power of unity - in which God dwells and delights in.”

ICE BREAKER

According to the most recent UK census, 14% of the UK population are from Black & ethnic minorities, did you know that 22% of Oxford residents are from a Black & ethnic minority background?⁷

Who are the nations in your context? Which nation(s) do you represent?

Can you recall a time when you heard sung worship or prayer in a different language?

REFLECTION

For eternity; we will be worshipping God with people from across cultures and nations. A wonderful vision that we see prophesied in Isaiah, and written about in Revelation.

Read Isaiah 56:1-8 aloud

In the book of Isaiah, God reveals what true justice and worship look like for His people. The beginning of this passage is an overall summary of the earlier chapters, summed up in saying “Maintain justice and do what is right”. The Lord clearly states that no one should be excluded from God’s people. Firstly, God addresses the eunuchs who perceive themselves as “only a dry tree”, but God reassures them that as they hold fast to His teachings and Sabbath they will receive a far greater reward than earthly offspring would bring. Then God invites those who are foreigners, who love the Lord, to enter his house of prayer with joy! God even declares his house will be a ‘House of prayer for all nations’. God is radically welcoming those who may have felt excluded. They were excluded due to previous laws and prohibitions on worship & the Passover (Exodus 12:43,45 & Deuteronomy 23:1). However, God, through this prophecy shows salvation is at hand for those who maintain justice, keep His sabbath and seek the Lord.

⁷UK Government, Ethnicity Facts and Figures

Divide into groups of three or four and reflect on these questions:

- *What is your response to seeing God's radical inclusion of those who may have been on the outside of worship & welcome in God's community?*
- *Do you resonate with the way the Eunuch or the foreigner perceive themselves in this passage?*
- *What assurance does this passage give you of God's character? And how should this impact the church?*

Read Revelations 7:9-11 aloud

Revelations 7 speaks of John's vision of the Angel of the Lord and the new creation. As we approach chapter 7, we see that the Lamb of God has opened up the seven seals of a scroll, which no one else was worthy to open except from the Lamb. When this scroll is opened, we see here in chapter 7 that a great multitude are gathered, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. What is remarkable about this prophetic vision is that people from every nation, tribe, people and language are gathered. Not just a select few, not just the Israelites, not just the disciples, but an innumerable collection of people from across the globe. Each group represented and worshipping God. They proclaim together the truth that:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb". It's a remarkable vision, further showing how the earlier passage of Isaiah 56:1-8 is fulfilled in the New creation, when all people will be gathered before God.

Divide into groups of three or four and reflect on these questions:

- *What is your initial thought when you hear about the great multitude gathered?*
- *Although it is a prophetic word of what is to come; in what ways can we seek to be a church where worshippers from every nation can feel at home?*
- *Have you personally been in places of worship, prayer or community where you've had a glimpse of Revelations 7:9?*

CURRENT ISSUE

The church is the place where we can praise the One who is Lord over all nations, people and creation. Where we can gather, even with our cultural differences. Where we can pray for situations across the globe. Where we can worship in ways that celebrate, honour and recognise the diversity of styles learnt through the centuries and across the world. Where we can open our church doors and our homes to people from many different backgrounds. And in instances when we face heated disagreements, make a mistake or are perhaps a bit clumsy, we are open, quick to repent and reconcile amongst ourselves. However, sadly our churches can look like one culture predominating to the exclusion of others. But God calls us to go beyond this, as we seek to live out a kingdom culture. Let us consider what it would look like to pray, praise and partake in community through capturing a glimpse of Revelations 7:9, here and now. To consider how we can recognise our culture and heritage in where we're situated, but also value, learn and adapt to other cultures.

RESPONSE

A core value of St Aldates is to be a house of prayer for all nations at the heart of Oxford. We want our church to be a place of welcome, where people experience a sense of home and where their whole identity is embraced, valued and celebrated. How can we as individuals join in with making our church an even more welcoming and inclusive place? In what practical ways might we embrace the many different cultures and ethnicities in our church? How might we foster and encourage different expressions of worship?

PRAYER AND MINISTRY

- Spend time as a group meditating on Psalm 67.
- Praying for a particular nation or a people group on your heart.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to be at work in your heart, bringing to light our own biases (conscious or unconscious), personal prejudices or assumptions which might have hindered your welcome of others. Consider praying a prayer of repentance and ask God to fill your heart with love for all of his people, made in his image.

ACTION

This week:

- Look at your Christian resources (books, podcasts, sermons etc) and ask yourself, if diversity is represented?
- Engage with a resource by a Christian from a different ethnicity or nation to what is most commonly represented in your collections
- Why not check out the suggested resources at the end of the study