



**SERMON - Lord, we come into your awesome presence!
The Congregation's Mission Statement - c.f. John
Lancaster.**

Why does the Church gather together? Why do we come? Why have you come? Is it to enjoy the music? - to listen to a great sermon? - to gossip and meet each other? - to 'Have fellowship'? - to Praise God? - to learn about God? - to be blessed by God? - ...

Why do Christians 'Congregate'? Well, for all the above (perhaps!) and more, but if we in any way accept that we are called into Congregation by God, then we should do so with care, and with not a little trepidation! God calls His People into Congregation with himself! and that should be a bit scary!!!!

Back in the days of Moses, and before the Ten Commandments were given, we find Moses, (who has begun to get used in some ways to being in God's presence), and the Priests, Elders and People being Called into Congregation by their God. They need to begin to learn just what that means, and God does not begin that learning process delicately or gently!

Moses, Aaron and Nadab and Abihu and the Seventy Elders of Israel have, with the People, just confirmed and entered into a Covenantal agreement with God, but really they do not know who it is that has made that covenant with them. Only Moses has really met God so far. Now they are called 'Up' to meet Him, and what follows is mind-blowing in its implications and without any precedent in God's dealings with Man since creation and unrepeatable until the Transfiguration of Christ.

Think about it! Those 74 men go right into the presence of God, and He is seen by them as He is, - no veil or mantle!! - God is seen by them all, and when they try later on to describe what they saw they stammer and stumble - 'Well, it was like,... like,.. but not really, but like....'

And it is recorded simply that they 'Saw God and they ate and drank!' And God did not destroy them! And the implication is that this was a shared meal! - although just how much appetite the 74 had left after that encounter with God is a good question! They had been taught the anyone who sees God cannot continue to live! Yet how could they refuse such an invitation? Caught both ways they go up to God's presence in great trepidation I am sure.

When God calls us to Congregation, what is it that we are called to - what do we 'Go up to'? and why? This question is, I believe, at the very core of what it

means to be called by God to be His People, - for that is who we are, if we are indeed called at all! First and foremost, we are called to meet God!

Moses at the burning bush and those 74, - whose lives should never be the same after this encounter I am sure, - those 74, and later on Jacob at Bethel, and in the Early Church, those gathered congregations like those in the House of Cornelius, (Gentiles upon whom God poured out his Holy Spirit in recognition that they too were part of that same Congregation'), all recognised (were hit square between the eyes by) the reality of God's Presence. Whenever the Church meets, (and we should remind ourselves of this every time we go come together!) whenever the Church meets it is standing on Holy Ground. Whenever we meet we are in the same place as those 74 - in the Awesome and Awful presence of Almighty God!

And when we are there you can be sure that God sees through our spiritual cosmetics right down to our faults and weaknesses, but He '... does not lift His hand against us!' for our Calling is through the Covenantal work, not of Tabernacle or Temple sacrifice, but of His Son on Calvary. We are welcome there and yet must be mindful of our sinful state, and of His Grace.

If this is so, then when we are called to Congregation we must also declare that we are here to 'Hear God' - to commune with Him. Again in the words of the congregation in Cornelius's house, 'We are here to hear what the Lord has commanded you to tell us' they say to the Apostle. We are here to hear what God is saying - to and through His Ministers, and to us, and for us, Today'

And finally, were are here to listen!

Now it may seem like that is what I have just said, but....

Going back to the Old Testament story we read tonight, it continues with Moses, God's minister to the People, going up the Mountain for 40 days with God, and so it is that, just about 6 weeks after the 73 others had been at that Congregation with God, they had forgotten Him! They had made themselves golden images, and forsaken the wonder of the Creator for the image of the things He had created! They had SEEN, HEARD and TASTED of God's goodness and met Him face-to-face, but had not listened - have not heeded - have not let it change them!!

God once said to His prophet Ezekiel, - 'the people to whom you are sent to preach '...to them you are like a pop-singer with a nice voice - but they don't head your words' They are so taken up with the voice, they miss the words! They even applaud at the end, but take nothing home!

When we gather as His Congregation it is to meet God, to Hear God and to Listen to God. To be overcome by His presence and so to worship in truth the One we meet. To hear what He says, through His Word and the word of His Ministers, and to listen, and so to be changed! We should never go out of that door the same as when we come in! To have a good time - Yes, perhaps! To be changed - Yes, absolutely!! **AMEN** -