

Introduction

- When I was in Davidson's Mains we faced a problem:
 - the building was too small!
 - literally!!
 - so much so that it was probably inhibiting the growth of the congregation
 - *you'd see it quite often - people coming in just at 11am, late or just before the service starts - walking up and down the aisles, looking for a seat, a space!*
 - now, there were often spaces in the centre of rows - but there was genuinely a struggle to find space!
- Healthy!!
- Church growth experts tell us that a church that is around 80% full at its main service of worship is unlikely to grow much further.
 - makes sense, kind of - harder to get a seat, uncomfortableness of a crowded service - might just not come!
 - so, for every new person who came, someone who had been coming slipped away... (and in a congregation the size of DMPC, it was really hard to notice that slow process - a recent church survey in England reckoned that 90% of people who left a church were not visited in the critical 6 weeks immediately after their departure...)
- Why am I telling you this?
 - because the growth - and the grappling with issues which prevent that growth - is actually meant to be normal!
- This one off sermon - *James next week - who knows after that!!* - is probably more a reflection of some of the things I'm currently thinking about
 - as such, its work in progress, not clear and sorted!
 - I might have got it wrong... maybe its more questions than answers!
 - *I have a more than nagging concern that we are not a growing congregation... perhaps even a (slowly) shrinking congregation?*
 - and that's a problem... a concern...
 - baldly, people in Fintry are not coming to faith
 - *now, there are exceptions!*
 - but not as many as the funerals of members I take...
- No way could take this on and come to definite conclusions - nor simple to address from one passage of Scripture.
- Hope to put it in the context of Paul's ministry - as alluded to in the passage we read earlier from Romans.

Text

- I'm assuming a certain amount of familiarity with the way Paul worked:
 - preaching in new places;
 - seeking to set up worshipping communities;
 - helping shape and guide the new life of those young churches;
 - appointing leaders to take on and continue that work - not simply maintain the new churches, but see them grow;
- In other words, Paul planted self-replicating, growing churches.
- That was his desire - and the desire he planted in the hearts of his converts.
- Witness the incredible growth of the Church in the early years, spreading like wildfire across the Roman Empire, turning the world upside down.
- Paul essentially worked his way round the Eastern Mediterranean, planting churches as he went - staying longer in some places than others, but always wanting to take the Gospel to new people.
- Hence his desire to go on to Spain - he saw that it was his duty to make Jesus Christ known - and so to see the church grow.

- Paul's assumption was that the church would grow.
- An expectation built on his experience, yes, on his faith, but most of all on the Lord he was seeking to make known - the Lord who promised to build his church on Peter...
- His ambition to build - in Spain, in Rome, around the Eastern Med, on his trip to Jerusalem - everywhere he went and in everything he did.

Implications

- Is that same desire - to see the church grow, to see it built and established - not the organisation, but the body of Christ - our driving ambition, the thing that shapes what we do, how we act and order our lives together?
- It should be!
 - we need to keep our vision before us - and that is sometimes hard!
 - we share the human tendency to go on doing the things we've done before!
- We need to ask ourselves more practical questions:
 - how are we planning and organising for growth?
 - how are we splitting up the task and making it happen?
 - are we welcoming, including - not just surface friendly?
 - do we present clearly the gospel in ways that can be understood?
 - discipling? are we encouraging (actually, not just in words) Christian growth?
- In other words, "How do we relate our purpose, which is outreach oriented, to what we are doing each week?"
- (Or, put another way, how does my doing XXXXX advance the vision? make Christ known? - elders, SS teachers, committees, organisations...)
 - How are we planning to grow? make welcome? make disciples?
 - Silverknowes? Planting? Organisational orientation or gospel orientation?
- Let me tell you some stories of churches here in Scotland who have tackled this question in different ways.
- I'm not claiming their answers are "right" for here - far from it. However, I have found sharing their vision and thinking through their approach stimulating and helpful.

Stories

- Ideas of how other congregations have responded to the question: "How do we grow from here?"
 - Church planting in Scotstoun and Whiteinch
 - P's & G's planting into a dying congregation.
 - Pre-church planting in Motherwell.
- Who are the most unreached group in Fintry?
 - let me suggest the 12s-40s
 - *It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, (Romans 15:20)*