



New Chapter

Luke 12:48

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

When you look at the context of that, it isn't necessarily those who have loads in terms of resources and numbers and money – it is actually those who have been given the information and insights about Jesus. So I think that applies to all of us and gives all of us an onus to do what we can.

My name is Ken Benjamin and I went into church ministry primarily, if I'm honest, because I found church somewhat dull and boring, and yet I really believed I was committed to the message if not necessarily all of the packaging. So my thinking was – if we make church credible and interesting and relevant then people will come and we've been trying to do that. I don't always succeed in that – nor does everybody in my church – but that's certainly our aim.

I was probably about 7 years into ministry and trying to do exactly that and we'd seen some measure of success. I guess whether that's real success or not only the Lord knows, and yet it became clear to me that even doing that it will never be the answer for a growing number of people for whom church as we do it just isn't the sort of thing that they will walk into and try, even with a great invitation, and we can't be OK with that. So I began to explore on a sabbatical break those people and churches who were trying imaginative ways of reaching out with the message of hope beyond the existing ways of church that we do. I was investigating that in a number of ways and somebody I spoke to said to me, “So Ken, when you come back from sabbatical, is what you're going to do like write a new chapter in the life of your church?” and my answer to that was, “No, it's not for me to write the whole chapter in the life of my church, but I might write the opening paragraph and see where our congregation take it.” I meant it as a metaphor but in the end it became like a literal paragraph for me as I thought about some of the things that are key as we're processing these sorts of questions in the UK at the moment. What I'd like to do is to read you that paragraph and ask you some questions about it.

Here's what I came back to my church with –

- when you have the message of hope for people – hope for now and forever
- when you have so much in terms of people and space and money and values and unity
- when your main ways are having great effect for some but little for many
- when you don't have to drop all the main ways that are having some effect to try new ways



- when what matters is the original Messenger more than cherished ways of conveying His message
- when your aim is to find out what pleases God and go for it wholeheartedly
- when it's OK to try things and fail sometimes and learn and move on
- when He promises to come with us in power and guide us by His Spirit
- when we hit on what it means to try things in His name

then what follows carries with it responsibility, opportunity and adventure.

So in many ways all that we're now doing in my church flowed from that opening paragraph in the life of my church. I didn't write the rest of it. My question to you, though, is to what extent does what I've just read resonate with you? To what extent is our story your story in your church and in your small group? What flows from that as well? What discussion points come from it?