

THE STORY OF OUR CHURCH

Our story begins
quite small, in a way...
A few twenty-somethings, twenty miles away...
Wanting more from church than just dutiful attendance,
more 'life' and transcendence
They met midweek, and opened the word...
discussed things they'd heard.
Small start, maybe...
but then, fruit grows from the tiniest of seeds.

Next, a thought (a nudge?) – 'relocate...'
... to start a Bible study in a housing estate.
So homes were sold and lives were shifted,
Eyes lifted, minds drifted – hearts started to soar...
Was it misplaced adventure or could this be the Lord?
And courage beat doubt, and faith beat fear.
They were brave, those few young pioneers.

And so, 50 years ago to the day:
our first Sunday meeting – wasn't much, so they say.
Just a few friends gathered to sing and to pray.
But the Lord is still growing
what he was sowing that day...

In the weeks that followed, he baptised them in his Spirit,
"This church we've begun," said the Lord, "I'm in it!"
What a difference... now the young church started to thrive.
And the meetings came alive.
Laughter and joy, mixed with moments of 'still'.
And the presence of Jesus in the middle of it all.

And the Lord was faithful, and the fellowship grew.
The Spirit was on the move and the church was, too.
1972...

The group bought a place they could call their own...
'Living Waters', at 29 Penn Road.
And for eight joyful years, this would be their home.
And as they met, and praised and prayed,
others were drawn in... people got saved.
They met in the lounge,
and baptised in the bath.
And nothing could stop what the Lord had birthed.

By the 1980s, they'd outgrown the place...
needed more space.
So on Sundays the church met in crowded school halls
Chairs in circles – wall to wall.

And there must have been something about those meetings
'cause people kept coming, kept joining, kept seeking.
The hurting found hope, marriages restored.
And lives were being changed by the power of the Lord.

And then, a word.
Spoken, repeated, re-heard.
'Lights on the hill'. *Could this be prophetic?*
Would the church be a torch from which lights would be lit?
Would God do something new in the heart of our town?
And so, with fear and faith, the church reached down.

Again, small steps at first,
but a God-sized vision had begun to be birthed.
And with Sunday meetings continuing to grow,
the church started looking for a permanent home.

Then, a possible site...
...and sleepless nights.
The plot of an old community hall.
But was this the call?
Do we stick or twist?
Wait, or risk?
And they moved, and they gave...
and the walls came down
Now our church had a home in the centre of our town.

The faithfulness of God helped overcome fear.
And the loan was paid off in just seven years.

Now, the Lord won't allow us to go through the motions.
He wants our devotion... our minds, our emotions.
And so the same Spirit who'd filled them before
came again in 94...
sent the church to the floor.
So touched by the Spirit that they roared with laughter –
and after,
you couldn't get them out of the door
The church was refreshed, and ready for more.

2000s. Now the call was to make more space,
for more stories of hope, more stories of grace.
"For the Lord has many people in this place."

And so,
the church stretched and flexed:
First, two Sunday meetings – and next,
in twenty-sixteen,
a second site near where that first meeting had been.

And God was faithful, and he drew in the nations,
diverse stories... wonderful salvation.
And a growing belief we are here for a reason...
a season
of favour in the heart of our town –
here for the poor, the oppressed, and the down,
and the lost and the hurting and those without hope –
a great convergence of rich and poor
So with urgency and love, we open the doors.

And today? Well, our meetings are small like before.
Sundays online and prayer on zoom...
the church in a cocoon.
But it's a pause – nothing more.

Because, inside the cocoon, who knows what's growing....
what the God of creation is even now sowing.
And what unseen fruit is starting to grow...
Because there's one thing we know...
a thread through our story...
that our God is faithful, so we give him the glory.
And we praise him for our beautiful, unfinished, story.

*"No sooner was I on my knees than God filled me.
I was still Frank, but Jesus was so wonderful, precious and
glorious. I forgot about the Spirit and worshipped Jesus."*

Frank Matthews

*"I remember looking at the centre when it was going up
and thinking, "That is an enormous building". I was quite
troubled over what we'd committed to – and their homes.
I had nights when I'd walk the floorboards, praying. Often
the prayer was, 'O Lord, help! This is such a big project.'"*

Neil Bartlett

*"Looking back is never a thing to do for long, of course.
Much more exciting is to look forward to what God has in
store for us all in the future."*

Frank Matthews