Well done everyone...

... with Christmas in Rocket Park!

* What a monster of an event to pull off!
  + It’s really like three events: A christmas fair for young families in the afternoon; a community concert featuring those school and pre-school groups and the Guest Band; and a Christmas presentation with carols and a play
  + And stretching from 3.30-9pm - that’s huge!
* What I felt really proud of is that we showed up with everything needed to pull this event off; even after the key organisers of the past were mostly gone
* So well done!

While lots of people played key roles...

... and it would be hard to mention them all

* I want to mention four groups:
  + **The anonymous sponsors!** 
    - In August we had no money
    - 71% of the money received was anonymous!
      * Included in that are a couple of people who I know were sponsors because they spoke with me about it, but from the event’s point of view they were anonymous
      * And most of the 71% was anonymous even to the point that I don’t know who it came from
    - Those of you who are out there thanks so much - it’s quite stunning!
      * The 71% also meant we weren’t endlessly obligated to outside parties
  + **The Carol Band** - a big commitment with lots of weekend rehearsals
  + **The Drama Group** - a cast of thousands but some in particular learnt a lot of lines and did spectacularly well. Wesley & Dylan for oversight
  + And most importantly the CIRP organising Team:
    - Rachel White - Food vendors, activities and tents, liaison with YMCA and community hall - the stuff we take for granted
    - Zara Brown - budget + admin, volunteers/ rosters and queen of details!
    - Jonathan & Fen Moy - council requirements, health and safety, spot prizes & first aid
    - Malcolm Heavey - security and set up/pack down
    - Susan Elijas - promotion & publicity
    - Tom Lovatt - coordinating with the Sound and Technical people
    - Rebekah Mora - stage management
    - Steve - Sponsorship oversight, Programme and Local Community connection

While the weather didn’t run in our favour...

... a lot of positives came out of this event

* *At least one couple said they want to come to our church*
* *The drama showed us we have real potential for performing arts outside of our church*
* *We re-connected relationally with local schools, preschools and plunket*
* *We thought through our next steps and follow up well, even if the weather limited the overall response*
* *I got to see how this whole event works and who has the skills to pull it off*

And that leads me to the big question, which I put in the enews:

* ***Why would God allow such awful weather when a church had worked so hard on an outreach event?***
  + I think this is a really important question
  + For some it may not seem a big question
    - But if you were in one of these four groups that invested heavily in it, the question becomes very real

And this was not just a little shower or two, as MetService told us

* There was a lot of rain
* I got fully doused while playing guitar at one point and had to take a hasty step back
* There was wind that even Wellington would be impressed with
* And even though we prayed at every meeting we had in the lead up months about the weather
  + Right up until 3pm on the afternoon of the event
    - The weather didn’t shift
* This was really unseasonal for late November!

So of course there is disappointment

* There’d be something fake about us if we weren’t disappointed
* I look back and think of all the things I could’ve done if I didn’t have Rocket Park to do
* And you think: God what’s going on?
  + You could’ve used me for all kinds of Kingdom building things, but instead you let this play out in the rain
* And more to the point: We’re a church that actually made an effort to get out amongst our community
  + Why would you allow it to rain all over the efforts to spread your name and your story in our community?
  + It just doesn’t make sense!

People answer this question in wildly different ways

* I thought it’d be good to think about it together while it’s fresh in our minds
* So here are my thoughts, mixed with some of those I’ve talked to this week:



1. **God often doesn’t ‘move’ in the way we expect (John 3:8)**

* It says in John 3 that the Spirit is like the wind
* We’re not sure where it came from, and it seems to blow wherever it wants
* We don’t get to control the Spirit
  + It’s like when you go back to that church or that camp where God really moved, and it’s just not the same
  + It’s like when everyone seems to experience the Holy Spirit except you
  + It’s like when you can’t find a life group quite like that amazing one you used to attend

I was in one church that threw everything in to putting on an Alpha course, having not done it for years

* They organised, promoted, prayed up a storm
* No-one came

[Revival example]

In all these examples...

... we have firmly in mind how God will act

* But we can’t control God

What it does is it keeps us humble

* It keeps us seeking God, rather than playing God

How do you relate with a God who seems...

... to change the way He plays things?

* + You show up ready
  + You play your part
    - Because when God does move in sync with your plans, you want to be ready

1. **Our end goals aren’t always the same as God’s (Isaiah 55:9)**

For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so my ways are higher than your ways

and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

* I imagined 4,000 people streaming into the park with their picnic hampers on a beautiful sunny day
  + Maybe that was never God’s end goal
* And it makes you ask: What was God’s purpose here?
  + That’s a great question to ask, and takes you much deeper into the will of God

... than if it had been a sunny afternoon

* lAnd this leads to the next point:

1. **Maybe He is testing our character (Job 23:10; James 1:3)**

3 For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.

* God and Satan look down at Job, and Satan says: *‘This guy has everything. But if you take away some of his comforts ... he’ll crumble ... you watch’*
* So what would happen if weather threatened Christmas in Rocket Park?
  + Would MAB still give their best?
    - Would we still be caring towards our community?
  + Or would MAB only care about looking good in front of friends and community?
    - Or feeling great about ourselves for what we did?

And this is what I love:

* I feel like MAB did show up and give their best - right down to the last volunteer

1. **Maybe this is crucial preparation for something down the track (Gen 50:20)**

* Maybe there’s something ahead of us that we wouldn’t be ready for without going through this first
  + Doesn’t that happen so often in our lives?
* As with Joseph, events that seemed to be for harm are the very things that enabled a significant future
  + And that’s exciting: What might God be doing in us as a community through this?
    - What might it be preparation for?

1. **Sometimes we can get things out of perspective (Micah 6:8)**

* Big events can overshadow real human needs, and we miss it because the event drives us
* Just a day and a half before Christmas in Rocket Park a year 12 MAGS student who’d just finished his last exam was killed in a car accident
  + I was thinking about how it would be for the MAGS choir to come and sing at our celebratory event Christmas in Rocket Park at a time like that
    - Dealing with the weather is one thing
    - But life and death brings a whole different perspective

1. **The rain falls on the good and the bad alike (Matt 5:45)**

* Never did that verse seem so relevant?
  + And that’s if we are bold enough to say that we are the good (just) ones!
* On one hand some have said the constant good weather every year with Christmas in Rocket Park is a sign of God’s blessing on it
  + On the other hand I heard a suggestion that the bad weather may show that this event is not of God

Jesus spoke in to this sort of thinking...

... when he said the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike

* We just live in a broken world where hard stuff happens
* It doesn’t necessarily result from any sin or indicate particular blessing

And I look at this way

* The day before Christmas in Rocket Park, there was a cultural festival
* Weather was in doubt for them too but it turned out well
  + Why would we deserve the weather to be good and them not?
  + If Christians were always favoured with better conditions we’d become the pampered elite

And the final thing that struck me in this is the most incredible irony:

1. **If God coped with the discomfort of being born in a feeding trough, let's not complain to Him for not granting more comfortable weather - especially when this is the exact story we were telling! (Luke 2:7)**

* The christmas story is all about discomfort, from the donkey trip all the way to the manger

I hope these points are helpful

* And if other helpful thoughts are occurring to you, share them with others
* This is an important question
  + And while it’s Rocket Park we’re thinking about, these same points apply when all kinds of disaster strike in our lives
* Let’s pray and then I’ve got a complete change of tack for you

PRAYER

John 1

In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,

and the Word was God.

2 He existed in the beginning with God.

3 God created everything through him,

and nothing was created except through him.

4 The Word gave life to everything that was created,

and his life brought light to everyone.

5 The light shines in the darkness,

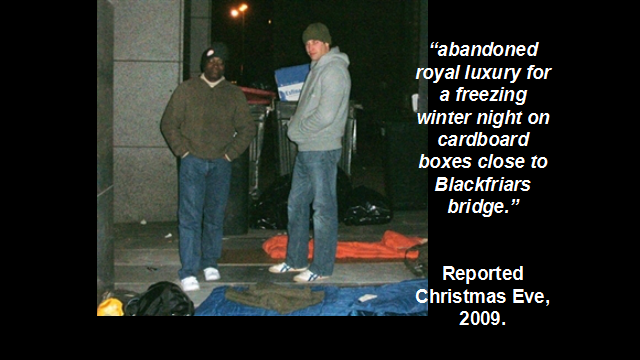
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

6 God sent a man, John the Baptist, 7 to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. 8 John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. 9 The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him. 11 He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. 12 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. 13 They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

14 So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.

I was shocked when I first saw this picture



It’s Prince William

* Here is the future King deciding to live with the homeless for a night
  + And this is not like NZ weather at Christmas time!
  + London is bonechilling when you’re outside at night in December

What shocked me almost as much as the photo itself

... is the fact that none of the newspapers that reported it

... noted any relation at all between this event and the Christmas story

* + - * Even though it happened on Christmas Eve!

And even some Christians I’ve talked to look at that photo...

... and say: I don’t see any link there with the Christmas story!

* I don’t understand how anyone could miss it

God - our King - gave up the pleasures of royalty and heaven...

... to be born amongst his people

* Prince William - an earthly monarch

- gave up the pleasure of royalty for a night to live among some of his subjects on the street

And why?

* Why would Prince William do this?
  + In order to find out what life is really like for those in his realm
    - *To identify with their struggles*
    - *To have first hand experience of what they face - even if only for a night*

And I’m no great fan of the British monarchy

* But Prince William has my respect
  + Because he bothered to find out what life is really like for those who don’t have it easy
* Doesn’t it make a world of difference to how you see any leader

... when they take the time to find out what life is really like for people on the ground?

This is the amazing thing about the Christmas story

* God - ‘The Word - became human and made His home among us!’
  + To experience for himself what life for us is like
  + God has my respect for that

And frankly, the idea of a God...

... who wouldn’t be prepared to rough it among those he created

... and just sat in privilege and luxury in heaven

* + - Would have no credibility for me
  + And that is actually how many religions portray the god they believe in

And so with Christianity comes this foundational idea...

... of leaving privilege, and going to those in need

Some evangelicals looked at Mother Teresa...

... and said: *‘This serving the poor business, that’s all very well.*

*But Christianity really is about believing the right things and spreading the gospel.’*

* What a limited perspective to hold!
* In caring for the poor, Mother Teresa was being incarnational
  + Acting out the Christmas story

And all of us are called to do that

* To go and be amongst and help those in need, and identify with them
  + This is the challenge of Christmas
  + It’s a whole aspect of Christianity that many have sadly viewed as an add-on

So what I’m talking about here...

... is us living out the Christmas story

* + *It’s doing what God did*
  + *Prince William managed to find a way to do it*
  + *Mother Teresa found a way to do it*
    - *What about us?*

But rather than just think about it

* I thought it’d be good for us to ***feel*** it together
* To feel what it is to leave luxury; and to feel what it is to be in need

You may or may not have seen the movie: The Blindside

* Either way you’ll get the idea
* Let’s look at these two video clips

**BLINDSIDE MOVIE CLIPS**

When I saw that movie it immediately made me think of Christmas

* She’s doing what God did
  + And this is a true story

I’ve thought a lot about being incarnational...

... during my ministry years

* I’ve been on mission trips and visits to poor parts of the world and poor parts of this country
  + And they are good
* But when I think of my Bible College friends who went to live in the slums in Manila
  + *And consider how much easier I have it here in Mt Albert*
  + *It’s easy to feel like I’m failing on this incarnational side of Christianity*

But here’s where I’ve got to

* Any of us can live incarnationally
  + Any of us can do what God did at the first Christmas
  + At heart, it’s all about really leaving our own world, our own worries and our own preoccupations
* And really entering in to the world of someone else
  + *To identify with it*
  + *To understand it*
  + *To help them in whatever struggles they face*

This is our first of three Windows on Christmas

* Can you live out the story of Christmas this year
  + *By really leaving your own world and entering in to the world of another?*
  + *I reckon we can all do that*

PRAYER