

SERMON: VISION.

In the King James version of the bible in Proverbs,(Proverbs 29 verse 18,) it says “ Where there is no vision the people perish.”

Other translations say, “ Where there is no vision the people cast off restraint.”

There is indeed I think some truth, in that where the people and the leaders have no vision of where God is taking them, the church is doomed to dwell in a land of dead dreams and unfulfilled destinies. More and more leaders in both the religious and the secular worlds are discovering the power of visions.

I think this is possibly the reality that the church is not being valid to people lives and churches are being marginalized by the very communities they are aiming to serve.

It is very timely that in this year when we are celebrating our churches fiftieth anniversary, that we had in September a vision morning, led by Canon Jean and Paul Kerr.

Many people came, which was encouraging, as it seemed, that if people were going to give up a Saturday morning this was obviously important to individuals at St. Mark's

There is a lot I could say about the morning. But two things struck me. The first was that during the Eucharist, Jean said, “ the church is made up of those who have been invited as special guests to a huge banquet, that we can invite others too. And yet so often, we behave as though, we only have crumbs to offer.

The second and most exciting thing that took place was when we were split into groups, and each group was told to discuss a particular area of ministry of the church.

After we reconvened Jean asked each group, what they had discussed and each group had focused on Families and children.

Or indeed our concern about the fact that we have very few families and children in our church, it was only a couple of months that the quest group ceased to be.

It was obvious to me this was God telling us what we should focus on.....it

seemed very clear directions as to where the Holy Spirit wants us to direct our mission and focus over the next couple of years.

In fact as each group said that they had focused on families and children, I wasn't the only one aware of a very palpable excitement in the room.

God had spoken.

As a result of the comments that came back from the various groups over the next couple of days, the Ministry Leadership decided the way forward would be to ask a small group to think about mission in the light of what had come out of the vision day.

The group has produced a Peoples Prayer, as well as looking at the services we hold here in our church. As well as producing a presentation at the meeting of the last Ministry Leadership Team.

So we are moving forward with this.

But I do want to talk on vision, what it means, what it will mean to us, what it means to God, and how it could transform the life of this church.

So, what is **vision**. By talking about vision I'm not talking about suddenly falling into a trance as God fills our minds with images of future events.

I'm talking about a God inspired action plan that will take us where we are today, to where he wants us to be tomorrow.

We may ask ourselves what is vision? And indeed there are some church leaders who are very ambiguous about the word.

But vision can be described as 'seeing the invisible and making it visible.' vision can also be described as, 'an informed bridge from the present to the future.'

Some years ago there was a book published called the Power of Vision, which defined vision as 'a mental image of a preferable future, imparted by God to his chosen servants, based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances.'

People with a vision know where God wants them to go, know what God wants

them to do, and know that God will empower them to obtain the vision that He gives.

Jesus clearly understood the power of vision. He often used very descriptive words to illustrate for the disciples the task before them.

Every great leader in Scripture was able to receive the vision from God that allowed them to lead the people forward.

Moses had a vision of liberty for his people and he led them from slavery to freedom. Joshua had a vision of a homeland and he led the Hebrews into Canaan against overwhelming odds. Nehemiah had a vision of a repaired and rebuilt Temple and he led the people in the work until the work was finished.

In the New Testament the Apostle Paul was a man was a man with unmistakable vision. He knew that he was to take the gospel to the Gentiles and this vision defined his ministry.

And yes, Jesus, also had a vision, a vision that he communicated to His apostles and to his church. A vision so powerful that even after his ascension, the church marched forward.

I believe that what happened on our vision day was that many of made time to focus on our future.....to think about what we need to do here in Biggin Hill, to listen to God.....and God very clearly honored that, by telling us we need to focus on families and children.

In February as part of this move, we will be bringing the Explore Service back in to church. We are keeping the name ' Explore Service' aiming at those that are not so mature in the faith or are seekers.....this is the service where Baptism families will be welcomed. This service will be focusing on families and children.

When we spoke about accommodating new people, Jean Kerr mentioned the very thorny topic of how we would need to change, she challenged us by asking the question " What needs to die if this vision is to be set in place?"

Very challenging.....we don't like the death of things we like to hold on to.

I would go on from what Jean said to ask ourselves, " What false Gods need to go.....be put to death for this vision to happen." I say false God's because so often

we can hang on to, cling onto, things that we think are important, but actually get in the way of our church moving on with this vision.

For example, we need to ask ourselves does the body language of our church, really say 'Welcome' we want you here?' If we are to have a café Style service in church, what affect will that have on the choice of furniture we have in church?

If we have a once a month Explore service in church.....will there be those who choose to miss this wonderful opportunity of engaging with those who come through our doors.

I always think it's a shame, when people in church have 'an it's not for me attitude.'that service is not my cup of tea.'

I personally have always chosen, in the churches I've attended, to go to the 'All Age worship,' I have never understood opting out, just because it didn't appeal, I had a good excuse.....I didn't have kids.....but I have always gone wanting to support this ministry to families.....I have valued the teaching that children get.....and Jesus tells us to be like little children...I believe if you have the mind, and the will you can get something out of these services.

Maybe that is the attitude of some people, but church is not about 'what suits me.' That's pew filling, but what God wants are disciples. Disciples think about what their leader wants.....and our leader, Jesus wants us to make other disciples.....to welcome these families.

When I was young, Friday nights was special, my mum would go shopping and get some treats, because it was 'Avengers night' we would watch Avengers with lemonade, fruit or cakes, as a family the beginning of our weekend. Now and again my brother would say , "We always have to watch what Jeanette likes, can't we for a change watch what I like on the other side.' Now and again my Mum would say, " He's right Jeanette, I think it's time you 'compromised' and in good grace let Ian watch what he wants to watch. It was the first time I had to deal with this 'orrible' word compromise, at first I was resentful.....but soon learned that it was important that this activity, watching television together as a family was just too valuable, to get up tight about, because now and again Ian wanted to watch something else.

I think that same attitude should be in church. Besides which if we are too outreach

to families they will need Grandmothers, Grandfathers, Aunties and Uncles, in the faith to help nurture them.

Jean and Paul Kerr, have offered to ‘walk with us’, which will be good because we can think strategically with Goals along the way, it means we can mark our success.

So as we continue to move forward with our vision.

When God gives us a vision it will always challenge us. It challenges us because it stirs us from our comfort zone and calls us to tasks we’ve never done before. The vision God gives a church, our church may turn us on our heads and cause us to see ourselves, our community the world and God through completely different lens.

Every great move of God, every great revival and awakening has challenged the church world. Those who are willing to embrace the vision and go with god have grown and have seen the power of god released in their midst.

But those who refuse to conform their will to God and his leading, will not move on in the faith.

I said a few weeks ago in one of my sermons, that when God sent out the Seventy-two he was honoring them by allowing them to continue his mission. It’s the same for Christians today, it’s something we are all called to.

There is power in vision when we embrace it and allow the presence of Jesus and the power of his Holy Spirit to use us to accomplish his will. Great things are in store for this church, if we take up the challenge of aiming to focus on families, to make a difference in people’s lives that will impact our community.

At the Mission and Outreach Committee we talked about the possibility of ‘enabling encounters between God and his people.’ We can all be part of that.

In the coming months we will thinking about what steps we need to deliver such a vision, to put into place a structure to implement a way forward.

William Temple said “the church is the only organization that exists for the sake of its nonmembers.”

At the moment we have time to look at our mission.

But as one member of the focus group, mentioned 'time is not on our side.' It is imperative that we focus our mission on families.

As I said at the beginning God 'has indeed spoken.'

If we truly want it God will give us the ability to make our vision a reality.