

## **Sent Out to Shine the Light of Christ**

Series: The Light on the Hill - Vision and Strategy 2026

Date: 3 December 2023, Advent 1

Location: St George's Battery Point

Texts: Matthew 5.14-16; 1 Peter 2.9-17, 3.13-17

One of the features of life here at St George's is that some people stay and others go. Battery Point is often the first port of call for professionals moving to Hobart for work. People might stay for a number of years and some settle, but others move on. There are also many people who have lived in Battery Point all their lives. And our church reflects this. Some of you have moved here just this year. Others like Dorothy, who I visited last Sunday, have lived here since she was a little girl. Many of you don't know Dorothy, but she is our oldest parishioner and is too frail to get to church. Her first Sunday at St George's was our 100th anniversary in 1938. People are always coming and going.

St George's is a place where all people are welcome, whatever your age, or stage, background, ethnicity, sexuality, education, income, or whatever because God welcomes each of us home in Christ. God's purpose for us is that we be a place where people are transformed by the Holy Spirit as they encounter Christ's love and light. But our communion services often close with a prayer that reminds us that we are also sent out into the world, some to specific ministries, like Marc and Joey in Cambodia, or Andy in uni ministry, but all of us to our schools, our workplaces, our neighbours, our families.

*Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.*

This is the last of our vision series. God has called us as St George's to be the Light on the Hill. Our mission is to see people (can you remember?)

*Drawn to the Light of Christ,*

*Transformed by the Light of Christ and*

*Sent out to shine the Light of Christ.*

This week we're looking at the final movement - sending people out to shine the light of Christ. We're asking what that might look like. What might it look like to live this prayer out - for us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, for us to live and work to the praise and glory of the Father in the power of the Spirit? There are as many answers to that question as there are people at this church. This is how we're tried to capture the common shape.

*We bless others through our character and service and testify to God's love in Christ at work in us and in his world. That's how we're sent out to shine the light of Christ.*

Last week we saw that God's purpose for each one of us is to transform us more and more into the likeness of Christ so that we increasingly reflect his glory. The shape of the true humanity that we see in Jesus is cross-shaped love. So we are called to love and serve God and our neighbour with the gifts God has given us. My hope and prayer for each one of you and all who come through our doors is that you be captured by God's vision for your life to shine with the light of Christ; And that through St George's you might grow spiritually and be equipped to serve so that you can be a blessing in the communities and workplaces to which you go.

So, what might it look like for each of us to Shine the Light of Christ as we're sent out from St George's? There are so many different texts in Scripture that fire our imaginations of what this might look like. But if you look at our readings from 1 Peter we see there are fundamentally 2 parts to shining the light of Christ - namely what we do and what we say. What we do - through our character and serviced. What we say - as we testify to God's love in Christ. Let's consider each in turn.

### Do

Have a look with me at 1 Peter 2.9. *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

There's a few things for us to notice in this text. First, God has called us from darkness to his wonderful light. In Christ he has shown us his mercy and grace. This means we have been given a new identity which is signified in our baptism: *you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.*

That new identity as the people of God creates a distance between us and our neighbours. We are, as verse 11 puts it, *foreigners and exiles*, or another translation reads, *aliens and strangers in the world*. That distance is not to be a cause for hostility. Our unbelieving neighbours and secular culture are not our enemy. The battle we fight is internal - against the sinful desires. How does Peter say we're to relate to our neighbours and our culture? Verse 12

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

We're to live good lives. We're called to love and serve our neighbours and be a blessing to those around us. We're called to help the needy, care for the sick, feed the hungry, cloth the naked, care for the poor, seek justice for the oppressed, to be rich in good deeds, generous and willing to share.

Notice that Peter expects we will be *among* our neighbours. Peter expects that our neighbours will know that we're Christians. He expects that they will see the difference Christ makes in our lives and that how we live will have an effect on them. Peter expects that we'll be *public disciples*. The Christian faith is personal, but it's not private. It's a public faith. Peter is just saying the same thing Jesus said that we read from Matthew 5.

**14** You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. [That would be absurd!] Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Being a Christian is about the whole of life. Christ's light needs to shine in every part of our lives, so that none of it is in darkness. But also so that he can shine through all areas of lives - how we relate to other people, our families, our colleagues, our enemies, how we think, how we use the gifts and resources he has given us, how we speak, how we act, how we do our work, how we use our leisure. All of these can be occasions for us to offer ourselves and what we do to God in worship, for his glory, and so we may shine the light of Christ.

When we live and work to God's glory, loving and serving our neighbours, God uses us to shine his light and make this world a better place.

2 weeks ago, one of the worlds most prominent atheists Ayaan Hirsi Ali published an essay entitled, [Why I am now a Christian](#). Her story is remarkable, growing up in Somalia and joining the Muslim

Brotherhood, then fleeing as a refugee to the Netherlands, embracing atheism, becoming an MP, navigating life as a public intellectual. One of the reasons she gives for her decision to become a Christian is the impact of the book *Dominion*, by historian Tom Holland. Through reading this she came to realise that the things she most valued about Western culture are the legacy of Christianity. She writes,

That legacy consists of an elaborate set of ideas and institutions designed to safeguard human life, freedom and dignity — from the nation state and the rule of law to the institutions of science, health and learning. [...] all sorts of apparently secular freedoms — of the market, of conscience and of the press — find their roots in Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

In a subsequent interview she adds more personal reasons for her conversion, and she is not saying that the church has an unblemished record, far from it! But what she points to here is the fact that when the church, and we as individual Christians have been the salt and light that Jesus calls us to be, we've brought enormous blessing to the world.

On a more personal level, I think of people like Anthea and Mike, sent out from St George's, shining Christ's light, blessing our city and state through their positions of leadership as they exercise Christ like character and service. Each of us has our own sphere of influence. The question is how can we shine Christ's light where he has placed us.

And that brings us to our second point. Shining the light of Christ is not just about what we do, it's also about what we say.

### **Say**

As we live good lives amongst our neighbours, Peter expects that they will ask us about why we're different, about where that light comes from. And so we will have an opportunity to shine the light of Christ is what we say.

Peter says in chapter 3

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, **16** keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

This is what it means to shine with Christ's light - to *always be ready to give the reason for the hope that we have*. We speak about Christ as we have opportunity. That's part of what being a public disciple looks like. Ayaan is doing just that, using her platform as a public intellectual. Notice that Peter says we are not to be arrogant or aggressive. Saying Jesus is the only way to God goes hand in hand with gentleness and respect. In this we follow the example of Christ. He shows us how to hold on to both conviction and compassion, truth and love, courage and humility. He did that all the way to cross which tells us we're more sinful than we'd dare to admit, but we're more loved than we'd dare to imagine.

We're sent out to shine Christ's light through what we do and say. How will we as St George's work towards that end?

1. By being a people of blessing to our community, as a church and as individuals. I would love each of us to have that question as part of our DNA. How can I bless those around me?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unherd.com/2023/11/why-i-am-now-a-christian/>

2. By developing a culture of sharing the good news of Jesus through providing tools for faith conversations and by sharing and celebrating the opportunities God gives us. This is an area I think we can grow in. When we did the National Church Life Survey only 27% of people said that they had invited someone to church over the previous year, and only 7% of people said they actively look for opportunities to share their faith. I would love to see us grow in our confidence in sharing our faith, to be praying for and looking for opportunities to share the light of Christ to our neighbours.
3. By being encouraged through structured and formalised sharing and celebrating of the work God is doing through our mission partners (the Durdins with Wycliffe, Andy Maskell with the University Fellowship of Christians, and Anglicare Tasmania). We'll hear updates from each of them in our thanksgiving service next week.
4. Financially supporting the future of St George's as a vibrant presence within Battery point by developing and implementing a plan for long term use of our site and establishing financially sustainable budgets (practical, not snazzy, but important!)

The question for each of us is, what does it look like for you to shine the light of Christ as you're sent out from St George's? What does it look like in your relationships, in your work, at school, in your families, with your neighbours, as you grow older and the body slows down? How will you give glory to God in all you do? How will you point to Christ in what you say?

God has called us to be the Light on the Hill. Our mission is to see people drawn to the light of Christ, transformed by the light of Christ and sent out to shine the light of Christ. Will you give yourself to this mission?

This vision is beyond what we can do. We need to be changed in order to realise this vision. That change will only come as we encounter God's love for us in Christ and are brought to worship the Father in the Spirit and through the Son. But God can do more than we ask or imagine.<sup>2</sup> So let's get on our knees asking God to work.

Will you pray for our family and neighbours and for those whom God will draw to St George's?

Will you pray God will transform you and your brothers and sisters here?

Will you pray for Battery Point, our city, our state and our world?

Will you pray that God shines the Light of Christ through us as we are sent into his world?

*Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.*

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 3.20