

Drawn to the Light of Christ

Series: The Light on the Hill - Vision check in 2025

Date: 24 August 2025

Location: St George's Battery Point

Texts: Genesis 18:1-8; Psalm 36:5-9; John 1:1-14; Hebrews 13:1-2

We're taking a break from our series on Philippians to spend three weeks looking at our Vision as a Church. I want to begin with a question. Why do we describe ourselves as St George's as the Light on the Hill? About 11 years ago a PR company put together a fundraising brochure for us. Their intern came up with the tag line "Save the Light on the Hill". I asked him where he got that image from. He said, "that's what St George's is, with the floodlit tower shining from the top of Battery Point." How remarkable, I thought. Here was someone who had never been to our church, and yet this was the picture they had of us. Remarkable because it is taken directly from Jesus' own words in his famous Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ... let your light shine before all people, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." This young man recognised God's call to us here, set in the very stone of our building, to be the Light on the Hill.

Now of course we are only the light not in and of ourselves, but because we belong to Jesus. In our Gospel reading we've seen that Jesus is *the* light of the World who gives light to all people. His light is his life which he gives for the world. And he gives all who receive him the right to become children of God. If Christ is the Light of the World, we as the church are his body in the world, shining his light.

Our mission is to do this in 3 movements: To see people Drawn to the Light of Christ, Transformed by the Light of Christ and Sent out to Shine the Light of Christ. We'll look at one of these movements over the next 3 weeks. Today we're looking at that first movement, Drawn to the Light of Christ.

St George's stands as a beacon of hope over Hobart. It's imprinted on the Hobart psyche. Since 1847 our tower has stood as an arrow pointing people to heaven and drawing people to worship. Our city loves the building and the building draws visitors through the week. The question is: how do we meet those who come who are spiritually hungry? *We offer a warm welcome that invites people to meet Jesus.*

Our theme text for this week is Genesis 18, where three strangers come to Abraham's tent. Abraham sees them. He goes out to meet them. He bows down before them, showing them respect and honour. He offers them water, freshly baked bread and a choice calf. Not leftovers, but the best of his food. There's no expectation they will stay, but shows this lavish hospitality to

nourish them for their journey. While they eat he stands waiting to meet their needs. That tradition of hospitality is still alive and well in the Middle East. Sadly, it's something that we've let go of somewhat in our busy, individualistic, technological world. This is hospitality outside of expectations of efficiency and profit. It's slow time, freely given. Abraham is attentive to the needs of the strangers, who have now become his guests. He's not distracted by his smart phone or other tasks. They are his focus.

We visited some friends in the UK who've been there for a number of years. Sadly they've not enjoyed their time. One of the most tragic things we heard from them was that when they went to church lots of people said to them, "It would be lovely to have you over," but no one actually followed through. And they realised that this was what people said to politely end a conversation and actually it meant the exact opposite of what was said. My friend's experience was doubly sad because in Hebrews we read,

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

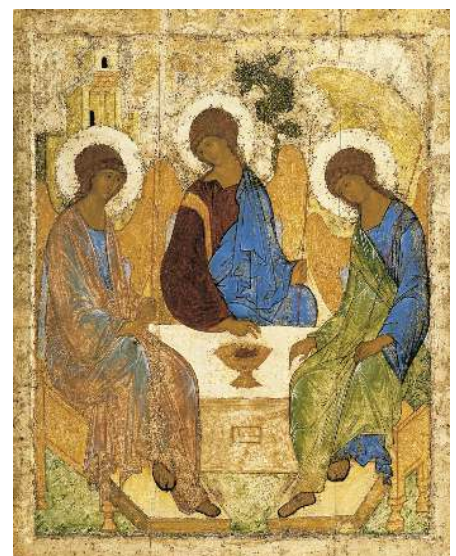
Hospitality is a point where we as the church are called to be counter cultural. This text offers a tremendous encouragement to us. You never know who it is, who you welcome. It may be an angel or even God himself in disguise.

One of my favourite art works, if not my favourite, is a 15th century icon of this scene from Abraham's life by the Russian artist Andrei Rublev. So far we've looked at Abraham's hospitality, but Rublev draws our attention to the opening words of the scene.

The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

It turns out that in welcoming these three strangers Abraham in fact welcomed God himself. This moment in Abraham's life becomes a window into the mystery of the Trinity. And so Rublev has the three figures sitting at table. There is so much to say about this icon. It's an arresting image that invites meditation. For our purposes, let me draw your attention to just 4 points.

1. The three angels represent the three persons of the Trinity. The Father is on the left. The Son in the middle. The Holy Spirit on the right. The colours of each figures' robes tell us this. Blue represents divinity. The figure on the left is mainly gold, symbolising how the divinity of the Father is hidden in his glory. The figure in the middle has red and blue robes. Red symbolises humanity, so this is the Son, both fully God and fully man. The figure on



the right is clothed with blue and green. Green symbolises life, and the Holy Spirit is the giver of life. The Son and the Spirit gaze at the Father, the fount of divinity.

2. Notice how if you look at all three figures, your eye slides from one to the other in a circle. This indicates the unity of the Trinity, one God, in three persons. Three persons in one God.
3. But, you'll also see that there is a space between the three, and it's where you as the viewer stand. This indicates God's invitation to you and me to join in his own life.
4. Finally, there is what looks like a cup on the table and in fact if you trace the shape between the figures on the left and right you'll see that it is a cup. This again points to God's hospitality extended to us, shown in the Lord's Supper. That God invites us to share in the table of his Son whose body was broken that we might have life and whose blood was shed that we might be forgiven.

That invitation to God's own table points to Jesus' own words in Revelation 3.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

What an extraordinary invitation! To open the door of our hearts to Christ, and to eat with him, and he with us. Jesus invites each of us to open that door. If you're here and you have not opened the door of your heart to him, do hear his promise to you today. He's patiently waiting for you to let him in, even as he invites you to eat with him, to share in his heavenly feast. We'll have a chance later in the service to taste that heavenly banquet as we share in the Lord's supper. Maybe today is the day for you to open the door to Christ and join in the feast.

We began with our welcome to strangers as a moment to encounter God and have come to God's welcome to us. I hope this perspective transforms how you see that call to welcome those who come through our doors. Your welcome can be a moment for you to encounter God and, at the same time, for those whom you welcome to encounter God. It's my prayer that the Holy Spirit would do that work amongst us to draw people to the Light of Christ as we extend that warm welcome.

I've tried to sketch a vision of what our welcome might be. But let's move to what concretely that looks like in our strategy as a church.

First, we extend that welcome and invitation to our neighbours and our city through our Big 4 events through the year: Christmas, Pancake Tuesday, Easter and the Baldwin Lecture. While every church service is an occasion of public worship where all are welcome, in these 4 events we deliberately invite our neighbours with postcards, (and I hope your own personal invites!) to join us in celebrating Jesus' birth, death and resurrection, to break bread with us at Pancakes and to hear something of the salt and light that Christ offers our world in the Baldwin lecture. Over the

past year we've welcomed more than 30 new adults to St George's. This is the most significant growth I've seen since I arrived back in 2013. If you're new, welcome! With so many new people, don't be afraid just to say hello and introduce yourself if you spot someone you don't know.

Second, we build a more connected church community through parish lunches and working bees as we eat and work together. We've seen how sharing a meal is a profound moment of welcome and friendship. We aim to alternate between a parish lunch and newcomers lunch every month or so. Speaking of which, we have a parish lunch today! So join us! I'd also love to get a monthly morning tea between the 8am and 10am services. We've been working to build a Community Building team to help us grow in this area of hospitality. So far we've got Jelly and Jenny on the team, but if you have a heart for this or want to have a go, I'm sure they would love to hear from you. Our beautiful garden offers a taste of Eden and indeed the new creation to our neighbours, and we grow together as we work in God's garden in our monthly working bees on the 4th Saturday of the month. Thank you to Ken for leading that ministry. We finish these with a barbecue. Feel free to invite neighbours or friends to join us for the working bee and barbecue.

Third, over the last 2 years we've worked to implement a clear 'engagement pathway' with intentional opportunities for faith decisions. You can see that on page 14 of the vision booklet. This shows the various ways we might encounter people, how we can welcome them and what we will do to help people experience the light of Christ, to take steps closer to him and to respond to his call on our lives. Deeper Conversations is a book club looking at the intersection of faith and culture. Alpha is an overview of the Christian life, what we believe and what we do. The course offers several invitations to make a whole-of-life commitment to Christ. In 2024 we had 6 people do Alpha, with one person making a decision for Christ. This year we had 20 people do Alpha and 6 people made decisions for Christ. We're going to be celebrating with Barbara and Marcello on September 7 not only Julian's baptism, but also their own new faith in Christ.

Fourth, as people take steps closer to Christ, we will clearly communicate the beauty of Christ and the basics of the Christian faith through our baptism and confirmation courses. Jesus' final command to his disciples was to make disciples of all nations by baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that he commanded. We continue to obey that command. Baptism is a sign of God's grace to us and our belonging to him. It defines who we are as Christians. Confirmation is for those baptised as infants to learn what it means to be a Christian, and to own it for themselves. There are three parts to this - the head, the hands and the heart. The head is about what we believe, summarised in the creeds that we say each week. The hands are about how we live, summarised in the 10 commandments. The heart is about our relationship with God, these are the spiritual disciplines of Church, Prayer, Word and Sacrament.

Since I've been at St George's, we've not done well in this 4th area, teaching the basics of the Christian faith through baptism and confirmation. In the early church catechumenate, or those wanting to become disciples of Christ, were given 100-300 hours of Christian instruction. We're not quite aiming for that, but we do as clergy really want to invest in training new Christians deeply in the faith, so that they can give themselves to a lifetime of Christian service and witness. Last year we piloted the *How to Be a Christian: Baptism and Confirmation* course, based on the Anglican catechism. We're currently in the middle of this course for the second year, with Clif running a group on Mondays, and our youth adults on Tuesdays.

Over the next 2 weeks we will look at the second and third movements of our mission - to see people transformed by the light of Christ and sent out to shine the light of Christ. For today though, what part can you play in these 4 strategies to offer a warm welcome to people so that they meet Jesus? As we offer that welcome, we do so knowing that only do so because God has first offered his welcome to us in Christ. We pray that his Spirit may use our moments of welcome to be encounters with God himself - that we may honour him and that others may receive his welcome and be drawn to the Light of Christ.