

Renewed

Series: AGM Vision

Date: 28 August 2022, 11th Sunday after Trinity

Location: St George's, Battery Point

Texts: Psalm 40, Ephesians 4:7-16; Matthew 28:18-20

Vision

Each AGM I reflect on the past year and lay out where we're going for the coming year. I do that in my report which has been circulated and copies are up the back. This sermon is aimed to complement the report. Since November we've been working with City to City Australia doing Multiply Tas, a one year program aimed at revitalising churches across the Diocese. In late May Parish Council and a number of others met to plan for the next 10 years. One of the outcomes of that day was a vision statement for what we want St George's to look like in 10 years.

In ten years time St George's Battery Point is a renewed and welcoming community of followers of Jesus who are growing spiritually and being transformed to be a blessing and to testify to our surrounding community.

I want to explore this briefly and then look at some focus areas for the coming year.

Renewed

In 10 years time St George's is a renewed community. Renewed. We chose this word because it captures where we are now and where we'd like to be. As a church I think we're feeling tired. That in part is because some of us are in the 4th quarter of life. In ten years time some of those who have carried the burden of leadership will have passed on the baton. Younger folk will have stepped up. Our kids will be teenagers and young

adults. That's the passage of time. But at heart we want spiritual renewal for all of us. The question is how? How will we be renewed?

I love that picture in Psalm 92 of "the righteous" planted in the house of the LORD, still bearing fruit in old age, staying fresh and green. What is their secret? They proclaim, "The LORD is upright, he is my Rock."¹

What is true for the old, is true for the middle aged and for the young. "Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD", David writes in Psalm 40. "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to my God. Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him. ... Many, Lord my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us."² I trust that what David sang is true for us too. As God has worked in St George's for the last 184 years, so he still has things planned for us.

How will we find spiritual renewal? The Psalms tell us - through putting our trust in the Lord. This too is St Paul's vision for the church that we read in Ephesians 4. God's goal is to see us "grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."³

Maturity means we have deep roots in Jesus, so that we're not tossed back and forth on the waves. "In every respect" means our heart and soul and mind and strength. What we say. What we do. How we think. Our habits. Our affections. Our priorities. It's every aspect of life with Christ at the centre.

God is at work among us, as we serve with all the various gifts he has given each of us, so we will grow as the body of Christ. In Ephesians 4.13

¹ Psalm 92.12-15

² Psalm 40.4, 3, 5

³ Ephesians 4.15

we read that the goal of our service is that, “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” What an extraordinary picture: the whole measure of the fullness of Christ! Christ, the one in whom all the fullness of God lives. The one through whom all things were made and through whom all things are reconciled to God. And God’s purpose for us is that we attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. This surely is a renewed, living, active, secure, church family where the love of God in Christ pulsates among us.

Community

That brings us to community. In Romans 12 we read that “in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”⁴ Each member belongs to the others. Our society is polarised and lonely. As the church we can be different. We can be what you might call a thick community, where we’re held together by bonds of love. In Christ we belong to each other. That is the spiritual reality. We have a taste of that at St George’s, but I’d love to see us grow in our depth of relationship. Morning Teas, Church lunches, Bible Study groups and Gardening Bees are a great way to do this.

Welcoming

We’re also a welcoming community. Romans 15.7 says, “welcome one another, then just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” How has Christ welcomed us? Freely, generously, not because we meet a particular moral, social, economic, ethnic, intellectual or whatever standard, but out of sheer grace. Because he loves us. Because

⁴ Romans 12.5

his arms are outstretched on the cross to embrace us. Jesus welcomes us, and we welcome others like Jesus.

Following Jesus

God welcomes us just as we are, but he loves us too much to leave us where we are. That is why Jesus calls us to follow him, to become his disciples. Because he wants to transform us and bring us to maturity in him. The text that springs to my mind here is Jesus' call in Mark 8.

“Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that German pastor who was executed by the Nazi's wrote, “When Christ calls a man [sic] he bids him come and die.” This is what it means to be a Christian. To die to yourself. To lose your life for Jesus' sake. To give your life to him. To hand over your future, your present, your day to day, your hopes, your desires, your time, your talents, your relationships, your sexuality, your fears, your money, your mind, your body, your actions, the whole of it to him. Taking up your cross means to walk in Jesus' footsteps. It means to obey him. It's a daily discipline, of prayer; of repentance, because we stuff up; of faith, because we must trust him before all else. It's daily saying no to self and yes to Jesus in humility, in patience, in generosity, in obedience.

Growing Spiritually

That brings us to growing spiritually. What springs to mind for me are what Jesus says are the two great commandments - love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength, and love your neighbour as

⁵ Mark 8.34-35

yourself.⁶ To grow spiritually means that we're growing in the vertical dimension of our lives and the horizontal, towards God and towards our neighbours. It means seeking God in prayer and Scripture. It means attending to our own hearts, and that daily discipline of repentance and faith. It means seeking the help of our brothers and sisters. It means growing in the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, and self control.⁷ It means contemplating the face of Christ and as we do so finding the Holy Spirit remakes us to be like him.⁸ We do this in personal spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible reading, in Bible Study Groups and in our corporate worship on Sunday.

My great hope is that if someone were to visit us in 10 years they would find a different congregation. Not because you've left. But because you've had 10 years to grow more like Jesus, and we'd have welcomed many more into our church family.

Blessing and Testifying

Love of neighbour will mean we do two things, as a Church and as individuals. We seek to bless our neighbours and to testify to Christ. We've seen that picture of blessing 1 Peter and Matthew 5. It's being salt and light through our good deeds.⁹ You may have heard the phrase, "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." It's attributed to St Francis of Assisi. The problem is Francis never said it. He was in fact a brilliant preacher. Neither does the New Testament only tell us to "do good" with speaking being an optional extra. In Acts, Jesus says to his disciples "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and

⁶ Matthew 22.37-40

⁷ Galatians 5.22-23

⁸ 2 Corinthians 3.18

⁹ Matthew 5.13-16; 1 Peter 2.11-17

Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”¹⁰ Tasmania is about as far as you can get from Jerusalem on the globe! 1 Peter says we’re to “declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness and into his wonderful light” and that we’re “to be prepared to give a reason to anyone who asks us for the hope that we have.”¹¹ We not only love our neighbours by doing good, we also love them by testifying to God’s love in Jesus, declaring his praise and giving a reason for the hope that we have. Because without Jesus they, like we, are lost. We seek to bless our neighbours because this world labours under the curse of the fall. We testify to Christ because we long for our neighbours to know the living hope God offers and to share with us the eternal future in Christ.

That’s our vision. That we would be the Light on the Hill. That through his work amongst us, God would draw people to the light of Christ, transform people by the light of Christ, and send people out to shine the light of Christ. And that *In ten years time St George's Battery Point is a renewed and welcoming community of followers of Jesus who are growing spiritually and being transformed to be a blessing and to testify to our surrounding community.* Will you commit to praying for this? Will you commit to growing yourself? Will you commit to playing your part in Christ body here at St George’s?

Focus Areas for the next year.

How will we work towards this vision over the coming year?

First, we’ll keep working to ***make Sunday a highlight of the week.***

We’ll keep working on music that moves us to worship God. We want to invest in a full AV upgrade to enhance our services and what we offer to

¹⁰ Acts 1.8

¹¹ 1 Peter 2.9, 3.15

those who join us online. We'll work on building our Morning Teas and lunches as a time for building community. We'll keep improving our great Kids Church under Leonie's leadership. We'll work at differentiating our 8 and 10am services, with traditional reflective worship at 8 and vibrant worship with Kids Church and morning tea at 10,

Second, we'll work at **growing in our confidence to testify** about Christ. Both the National Church Life Survey and the Christian Life and Health survey we did last year showed that not many of us are confident to share our faith. We have lots of opportunities for this with great connections with our community and regular newcomers. To help us grow in confidence sharing our faith we'll do the Ripple Effect training program in our Bible Study groups.

Third, we'll offer **opportunities** for those exploring faith with us **to make a commitment to Christ**. Things like Alpha are a great way for people to get an overview of the Christian faith, to build friendships, to ask questions and to make a faith commitment if they would like. We've not run one for several years, so I hope to run Alpha or Life Explored in Term 4 this year. Please let me know if you'd like to help. And if you're exploring faith, you're not sure if you're a Christian, or you've got questions, watch this space! I would love you to come!

Fourth, we are working on **structural changes to facilitate growth**. I remember Mike Blake telling me that every 5 years he either gets a new job or reinvents himself in order to keep fresh and grow. Our fatigue as a church is in part because some of our structures are not working as they

could and should. This is my 10 year at St George's. I know I'm as much a barrier to growth as a catalyst. With both Amy as our Operations Manager and PC we're working to review and make structural changes that will facilitate growth. On that note we're looking for a minute secretary if anyone would like to help.

Finally, we're going to **keep investing in Bible Studies** which are one of our great strengths and engine rooms of spiritual transformation. We also want to strengthen our partnership with Crossroads Presbyterian so that our teens get along to their youth groups which meet here on a Friday evening.

I want to thank Amy, Tristan, our wardens, Anne, Arthur and Simon, PC, Leonie and the Kids Church team, Bible Study leaders, those who pray, and everyone else who contributes to our common life. To him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to his power at work in us, to him be glory in St George's and in Christ Jesus.

Amen.¹²

¹² Cf. Ephesians 3.20-21