

The Light on the Hill

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

Date: 12 November 2023

Location: St George's Battery Point

Texts: Psalm 36:5-9; Revelation 21:22-27; John 1.1-18

Food. Water. Sleep. We need them to survive. Which one if you didn't get it would kill you first. Food? Water? Sleep? The answer is sleep. They say that sleep deprivation is a form of torture - just ask any parents with a newborn! But is that all we need as human beings?

What is the greatest need we have as human beings? It's to be known and loved. It's why family is so important. It's why our culture is obsessed with romance - the idea that if you just find the right person and fall in love you'll be complete. We're told that story so often we almost believe it's true. But then we bump up against the reality of life. Even our most precious relationships are fragile, and in the end, passing. We long to be known and loved imperishably, eternally. The question of God is not just theoretical, it's also deeply personal. It's not just does he exist, but more than that, does he know me? Does he love me? We have a sense that something fundamental about who we are hangs on that question. That in knowing God we might also be given the truth about ourselves. It's a question that the pleasures and possessions of this world can only push aside for so long.

Today we're embarking upon a 4-week series looking at vision and strategy for us as a church for the next 4 years. We launched our vision for St George's as the Light on the Hill back in 2019. Over the past year Parish Council and the staff team have reviewed that document and reset our vision for the next 4 years. We've worked to clarify concrete goals that we'll be working towards. Our prayer is that in ten years' time, *St George's will be a vibrant and welcoming community of more than 130 followers of Jesus who are growing spiritually and who are being transformed to be a blessing and to testify to our surrounding community.*

That vision has a sense of life and vitality, and we've put in a number, because we believe that's about the size we need to be to do what God is calling us to do in Hobart. That's where we pray, under God, we'll be in 2033. That vision will bring change. But what stays the same is our identity and our mission, who we are, and what God has called us to do - to be the Light on the Hill, and to see people Drawn to the Light of Christ, Transformed by the Light of Christ and Sent out to Shine the Light of Christ. Church is not just a nice social club that we go to once a week. Church is where we come together to encounter the true and living God in his Son and by his Spirit. And therefore, church is about the deepest things of this universe, the deepest things of who we are and the longings of our heart. Saint Augustine at the beginning of his account of his long spiritual quest says to God,

“You have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

When we find that rest, we find we're given ourselves, given each other, and given the world as the theatre of God's glory in which we find freedom in serving him.

Psalm 36 says, "in your light we see light." This morning I want to start by renewing our vision of the One who is at the centre of all things, the true Light in whom we see light, because only then will we truly know ourselves and what God calls us to.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

John's gospel begins on the broadest canvas. He peers back to before the beginning of creation and finds that God was already there. And in his being God is one and yet differentiated. There is also the Word. *Logos* in Greek. It is through the Word that God made all things. This one is the source of life. All things find their existence in him. From the smallest subatomic particles to the largest galaxies he sustains and stands under all things. In him is life - your life, the air you draw in, the blood coursing through your veins, it's all from him. His life is the light of all humanity. This world is full of darkness. We see it in the war in Gaza and Ukraine. We see it in family violence. We know it in our own lives and families. Sickness. Depression. Anxiety. Wounds sustained and inflicted. Guilt. Shame. Loneliness. Sorrow. Death. His light shines in this darkness. And no matter what darkness there is in this world, it cannot grasp his light much less snuff it out. Whether we recognize him or not, he is the true light that gives light to all people.

If love is our greatest need, then our greatest fear is that we might be alone. John tells us no! God has not abandoned us. He is not distant. This one who is the source of life and light he has come down and come near.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. This is the mystery of the Incarnation. The story of the Bible could be seen through the lens of presence. God was present with Adam and Eve in the garden. They were exiled from his presence. At Sinai God came down and the mountain shook with the thunder of his presence. He gave Moses instructions for the tabernacle - a tent where God's presence would dwell in the midst of his people again. And the glory of his presence filled Solomon's temple. Tragically God's people sinned again and again, and his presence left the temple and they were sent into exile. But now John says, God has come down again to humanity. And this time he has made his dwelling, not in a tent, but in frail flesh. In the man Jesus of Nazareth, God has become one of us and united humanity to himself for all eternity. Ancient Israel saw the glory of God descend on Mt Sinai in smoke and lightning. We have seen the glory of God descend as the suffering servant dying for his enemies, for you and for me. The Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Who is God? What is he like? It's a question that the greatest philosophers, artists and poets have asked through the ages. It's a question that lies in every human heart. John says, *No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.* If you want to know God, come to Jesus. He's the Way, the truth and the life. And he's full of grace for you and

for me. He's the Good Shepherd. He's Light of the World. He's the friend of sinners. He's the hope of the hopeless. He forgives sins. He feeds the hungry. He heals the sick. He gives sight to the blind. He makes the lame walk. He cleanses the foul. He restores the broken. He frees the prisoner. He delivers those held in Satan's power. He exalts the lowly. He opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. He welcomes children. He calls the young, the old, the rich, the poor, women, men, people of every tribe and language and nation, gay and straight, single and married all to follow him. He's the man of sorrows. He's the suffering servant. He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He's the risen saviour. He's the firstborn from the dead. He's the resurrection and the life. He's the king of glory. He's the Alpha and the Omega. He's the beginning and the end. He's the bridegroom and the church is his bride. He's the judge of all people. He's coming again soon in glory. Do you know him?

John says, to all who receive him, to those who believe in his name he gives the right to become children of God. Jesus meets the deepest longing of our souls. In him we can know and call God *our Father*. In him we can hear God's word to us, this is my daughter, my son, whom I love. It's the truest word on our lives that each of us longs to hear. This is why we're the light on the hill - because Jesus is our light and life. He's at the centre. He's our vision. He's who we hold out. Without him we're nothing.

One of the great joys of serving here as your minister for the past 10 years has been seeing Christ's light at work in your lives. I've seen Christ gently bring healing and life and hope and joy. He's bringing freedom from prisons of fear and despair. I've seen lives transformed as Christ's light breaks chains of untruth and condemnation. I've seen his peace and comfort carrying people through sorrow. I've seen his light shining through people's grace and humility in their workplaces. I've seen people transformed as Christ's light shines into dark corners of their lives and by his power they say "no" to sin and "yes" to godliness. I've seen people shining Christ's light as their bodies slow down greeting the future with courage and joy and peace.

John writes that John the Baptist's role was to be a witness, testifying concerning the light so that through him all might believe. He was not the light, he came only as a witness to the light. John's calling is our calling too. As St George's we're only the Light on the Hill because we're witnesses, telling others about the Christ, the Light of the world. Our task is to point to him. That might be as simple as letting friends and colleagues know you're a Christian, or sharing a story of answered prayer, or inviting a friend to church. Jesus is all we've got to offer our friends and neighbours and this city. We're called to be the Light on the Hill. We exist to see people drawn to the light of Christ, be transformed by the light of Christ and be sent out to shine the light of Christ. We've been shining the light of Christ since Peter's dad was the rector here and Anne was a little girl. We were shining Christ's light in 1920 when our rector Thomas Quigly preached a sermon against the white Australia policy, calling it "the very negation of

Christianity” and saying that the phrase “the yellow peril” should be forgotten. We were shining Christ’s light back in 1858 when our second rector Henry Phipps Fry said in his farewell address,

Rest not dear, dear friends, until your souls are saved - until you have peace and joy in your hearts through the assurance of your acceptance with Christ and the experience and witness of the Holy Spirit within you that you be children of God. May every one who is still unawakened be led to seek the Lord Jesus as men who have sins to be forgiven, a Saviour to serve and heaven to gain. They who would be made meet for the inheritance of the Saints in light must not hope to attain the Crown of Glory by a life of slumbering indifference or worldly pleasure and gain seeking. The day is far spent, the Lord is at hand. Oh may he touch every heart that is still unawakened among you with an anxious concern for your precious souls; may you feel the burden and danger of sin, the terrors of God’s judgement, and find no rest until you obtain the true peace which Christ gives to the hearts in which he reigns by love and which he renews and sanctifies by his Spirit.

On our trip to the UK we visited the Stirtons. In 2018 they spent 6 months at UTas as visiting academics and came to church here. Their time with us was transformative.

We welcomed them with the love of Christ. Ruth encountered Christ and was transformed by his light. And we were able to send them back home to shine his light. That’s what we long to see for all who come through our doors, however long or short they stay. Christ draws each of us to his light. His purpose is to transform each of us. And he sends each of us to shine his light. Shining the light of Christ is a mission we do together. Each of us has a part to play with the gifts God gives us. We’ll be looking at what this might look like for us over the next 3 weeks. But as together we find life in the light of God’s smile and as we like John bear witness to Christ we pray that God will work powerfully to do this among and through us - to draw people to the light of Christ, to transform them by the light of Christ and to send them to shine the light of Christ. We pray that he would do this for our friends and neighbours, for children and their parents and grandparents, for the uni students and young professionals who call Battery Point home, for the baby boomers of our village who are retiring and wondering what life is all about when what they have built is slipping through their fingers, for the leaders of city and our state who live and work within a stone’s throw of this building. Will you join me in praying that Christ’s light will shine from this place? Will you seek Christ’s light in your own life? Will you be a witness like John to the light?

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations [even ours].
Amen!*