

Vision Sermon – 4th Feb 2024 (John 10:1-10 & Eph 3:14-21)

The Vision statement at Christ Church is 'Learning to live the life'. It is based on John 10:10; when Jesus says "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full", that is some vision to live life to the full; in its abundance; till it overflows.

Jesus claims that he came that men might have life and might have it more abundantly. The Greek phrase used for having it more abundantly means to have a superabundance of a thing, beyond measure. To be a follower of Jesus, to know who he is and what he means, is to have a superabundance of life. You might remember the Pepsi advert slogan in the 90's 'live life to the max'.

In short, Jesus promises us a life far better than we could ever imagine, a concept reminiscent of 1 Cor 2:9, where Paul says "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." Or in Eph 3:20 where Paul tells us that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, and He does it by His power, a power that is at work within us if we belong to Him.

When we try to live our own lives, life is a dull, dispirited thing. Empty and meaningless. When we walk with Jesus, there comes a new vitality, a superabundance of life. So, we live life to the max – when we live life the Jesus way. It is only when we live with Christ that life becomes really worth living and we begin to live in the real sense of the word.

To live life the Jesus way, is to learn or practice being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did. That is the vision we aspire to here at Christ Church.

The passage promises superior, superabundant spiritual life, life empowered by the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ. Because Christians "have" Jesus Christ, because he lives within them, they have the riches of the superabundant life. This is what Paul meant when he said he counted all things loss, that he might win Christ. John 10:10 promises a spiritual dimension to life, not physical abundance.

So, what does that mean for us here at Christ Church, this year. You may or may not be aware that after the staff team away day at the end of May last year, we identified a set of priorities, that gradually over the last 6 months have become refined into 3 areas. I think these can be summed up in 3 words. **Deeper, wider, younger.**

We would love to see the church family growing deeper in discipleship, wider in seeing more people becoming Christians and growing younger. Having more children as part of our church family.

So let me try and unpack these a little more: -

1) Growing deeper (in discipleship)

- There has been a focus on whole life discipleship for a number of years at Christ Church, with a particular focus on helping individuals identify their frontline (the missional location for being Jesus, doing what Jesus would do – your place of work, where you live, your street, the place where you hang out; gym; cycling club; school gate; Lego club; warm space...)

- Over the course of this year there will be an invitation to join the rhythm of life. This a set of 6 practices that will encourage us to get spiritually fitter and go deeper with Jesus. As we learn to practice these practices over the course of the year we will become more like Jesus. Anita has invested a lot of time and effort into developing these practices to help us go deeper and become more like Jesus.
- The rhythm of life will be launched on Ash Wednesday and Sunday 18th Feb – so come along then and sign up for the journey over the next 12 months. Did you know it takes 6/8 weeks for a new practice to become a habit. A normal part of every day life. So, we will learn 6 practices over the course of the next year

Jesus said, anyone, who hears these words of mind and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his life on a rock, a foundation that would not shift regardless of the storms. Doing is what makes the difference. Not learning, not teaching, not note taking, not, you know, just taking in more and more and more Christian information.

You know, unapplied truth is like unapplied paint. You can buy all the paint to paint your house, keep it in the garage, your house doesn't change. Applying the paint is what paint is for. Applying the teaching of Jesus is what makes a person deep. And ultimately what changes the community and ultimately what changes life.

2) **Going wider (more people become Christians)**

- If Jesus promises the full, abundant life and that has been our experience, do we not want others to know the reality of Jesus' life changing love and forgiveness. Of course, we do!
- So, part of our vision is to see new people come to faith in Jesus, to experience that new full, abundant life – to be able to life live to the Max.
- Did you know that more people have signed up for Alpha this year than for a long time (there are currently 17 guests signed up this year).
- This is just part of the way people can be introduced to and encounter Jesus. There is of course the opportunity to bring a friend, family or neighbour to one of our services.
- Or you could bring someone to Warm Space café on a Thursday – a free lunch, an opportunity to listen to some music and meet new friends or have one of the team chat with you and pray for you.
- The new Dementia friendly, warm space café on the third Thursday of the month – a warm, safe space for those suffering with dementia and their carers.
- Great opportunities to talk about the fullness and abundance of life that we experience and engage people in conversation and prayer.
- Lastly the Development of the school chaplaincy team. You may or may not know that we have 9 schools in the Parish. 1 Catholic primary, 1 secondary and 7 other primary schools. We have a very good, close working relationship with Christ Church infant and junior schools. We provide governors, regularly run assemblies in school, host acts of worship in the church, run Bible clubs in school & host Experience Events (experience Christmas, Easter etc) learning encounters that help the children engage with the Biblical stories and encounter God through interactive storytelling. Diane has been a visible presence along with the youth workers at

Good News church and Resound at Downend school. Running well-being courses and being available to chat to the students.

- Over the course of the last 4/5 months Harriet, Ali & Julie have been working hard at establishing a new School Chaplaincy team and developing contacts with Bromley Heath Infant and Junior School, Black Horse school and Frome Vale Academy.
- This has meant we are now partnering with those schools and seeking to provide assemblies, prayer spaces, experience events and hosting gatherings in the church building them.
- It has been so exciting to see how the church has been so warmly welcomed into these community schools and allowed us to be a visible presence and talk about Jesus and the fullness of life that he offers.
- I particularly want to thank Harriet and Julie for their ongoing hard work in leading this team and organising all the school's ministry.
- As a result of all this new work and ministry the PCC have agreed to increase Harriet's paid hours to 24 hrs a week in order to help develop this ministry.
- You may be interested to know that as a church we have recently completed our annual Statistics for Mission. What we discovered is that last year we have welcomed 30 adults, 10 children & 1 teenager into the Christ Church family.
- How encouraging is that. God is good, he is at work by his Spirit, through us.
- God is building His Kingdom – He will do immeasurable more than all we can ask or imagine.
- Thank you, Jesus.

3) Growing younger

- This our final area of priority. And perhaps unsurprisingly it is a priority we share with the wider Church of England. The C of E wants to double the number of children and young disciples in the church by 2030.
- To grow younger. To increase the number of children in our Church family.
- This too is one of our priorities.
- Which is why we are investing money in paying Harriet to help lead and develop our ministry to children and schools.
- Why Anita & Harriet plan family outreach/evangelistic events throughout the year and run Tea & Toast drop in on a Tuesday after school.
- In serving the young families of the local community and developing contacts and relationships with those that are open.
- We are seeking to connect with and draw in those that are open to hearing about Jesus offer of life in all its fullness and abundance.
- The bottom line is if we don't invest and grow this ministry the Church will be dead in 20 years' time.
- A significant proportion of our congregation is of a certain age.
- If we are to be a viable, missional presence in 20 years' time we need to be reaching the children and young families **NOW**.
- We have also been sensing that God is calling us to reach out to the families in Bromley Heath in and around Quakers Rd in order that we might share Jesus with them too.

- Over the end of last year, we have started praying about what we might do and what that might look like.
- Developing a presence and partnership with the Bromley Heath schools is the first step.
- You may know that at Christmas we trailed a one-off Christ mas Café event at QR and found that we had 5 families turn up amongst others. £ of whom were not members of Christ Church.
- Now we need to keep praying and try a few things out as we seek to be led by God in all that we do to grow His Kingdom.

A Call to action

- How can be involved? What can I do?
 1. Well, I have outlined numerous ways in which we want to grow this year, so first and foremost I encourage you to **pray**.
 - Pray that we may grow Deeper, Wider and younger.
 - Pray for Warm Space, Dementia friendly café, School Chaplaincy Team, Family events.
 2. **Invite** someone to something
 3. **Tell** someone about Jesus and the fullness of life he has given you
 4. Prayerfully review your **giving**.
 - In order to develop and grow these ministries we have employed Harriet for an extra 8 hrs a week & Beth an extra 5 hrs a week
 - That will cost another £8000 a year
 5. **Serving** on a team – we need more people to serve on the Children’s ministry team on a Sunday and people to join. The School Chaplaincy team (please to speak to Harriet if you are interested in knowing more or serving)