

Vision Sunday

Proverbs 29:18 tells us that “Where there is no prophetic vision, people are aimless. But whoever treasures the law is blessed”. What the writer literally says is: No vision - people let go. In other words we tend to neglect what God has called us to do and just ‘let go’ and bum around, without a compelling prophetic vision driving us forward.

We start up new activities with a compelling vision for what we expect to achieve, but vision leaks and what so often happens is that we end up just maintaining something that is appreciated by those who use it but it is not achieving what it was originally set up for. As a church we have lots of activities, but the question I want us to ask ourselves today have we lost sight of what it is all about - lost our vision and passion and enthusiasm for the great task God has called us to be about?

This morning I want to do two things - 1. Remind us of what our vision is and refresh it, to encourage those involved with the various services we provide for the community and also hopefully to envision others who are not involved to see that they could play a part in making things happen. 2. I am going to ask Dave to share a new vision as he did at the church members meeting last Monday for changes that will be taking place in our Sunday night activities.

1. What’s it all about?

The December Newfrontiers magazine listed ten shared values of Newfrontiers churches. The very first statement is that we want to see: *“A gospel-preaching church that is loving, righteous in its lifestyle, involved in world-mission and reaching the unsaved in its community by both public and personal evangelistic activity.”* Amen?

As we are also part of the Baptist Union let’s see what the Baptist declaration of Principle states. *“That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to take part in the evangelisation of the World.”*

But these both just reiterate what Jesus said - *“Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations.”* That is our mission;, that is why God reached into our lives, forgave our sins and called us to follow Christ. If we treasure what God says and put it into practice then we will be blessed, very blessed.

2. Where are we at?

We live and worship in the midst of a community here in North Ascot of some 2,000 homes housing 5,500 people of whom 77% stated in the 2001 census that their religion was Christian. ABC folk living in this area represent only about 0.7% of this community . There is huge gap between 77% professing Christians and the 0.7% of those who come to ABC; it is less than 1 in 100. What a mission field! I think many of those who see themselves as Christian have a very jaded view of the church. We have an opportunity to

show them another way, by being a different more accessible kind of Church. Look at the potential – 3 out of 4 of those who live round here see themselves Christian. But do they know the Lord? Most do not, but we do! So how can we capitalise on this? We have a number of activities intended to connect with the community with a view of preparing the way for them to meet Jesus to radically change their lives. But the question is how fruitful are we? If we are not seeing a steady stream of people coming into God's Kingdom, why not?

At the moment we are only seeing a few coming to know the Lord, one here, one there, for which we are thankful to God, but God is bigger than this and can do far more than we ask or imagine. Jesus tells a parable about a fig tree in **Luke 13. (Read)**

3. What can we do?

What should we do with Christian activities that are not seeing much fruit, not seeing unbelievers making steps towards Christ. We could chop them down. Close down the Toddlers, Let's do lunch, Resonate, CAOS! Women's Own, Men's breakfast, Girl Friday, small groups and our Sunday meetings - close them down; but Jesus says, no let's give it another year let's dig it round and fertilise it; if it still doesn't produce any fruit, then we must cut it down and use the ground for something else that will be more fruitful.

So let me refresh the vision for some of our activities.

At Let's do Lunch we feed the community once a month so that those of us who know the Lord can get alongside those who don't know him. It starts with building friendships and then getting together with our lunch guests outside of this building, with a view to letting God's love shine out of us in such a way as to draw them closer to the Lord. This means believers sitting on tables with our guests not with Christians they already know, engaging them in conversation and looking for divine appointments and opportunities to befriend - but we do need to be ready to pursue such friendships in our own time outside of the ABC context. God will use any one of us to bring someone closer to him.

The same applies to parents who bring their children along to CAOS! Do you just drop them off, or see this as an opportunity to get to know other parents/ families. Do parents who come to toddlers for their toddler to play and interact with other children or to get to know the non-Christians who flock in here on a Wednesday? Do young people who come to Resonate have a passion to bring their friends to a place that will help them meet with God? This is what all these things are all about and we have to keep rekindling such a vision.

Some years ago God spoke to us about seedless grapes - do we have nice enjoyable innocuous activities that have no seeds, nothing that presents anything of Christ in any way. The vision for all our activities is to see the people we serve coming to know the Lord. Let's ask God to give us just one or two people to befriend outside of these activity. Let's look at ways in which we can 'make our mark' like Zorro, in a positive way in our community. Everything we do has to be about making Jesus known to those

who don't know him. Because if we don't make him known to our friends and colleagues and neighbours and family they will go to hell; there is no middle way - its either hell-fire or being forgiven and set free and healed and made whole and spending eternity with Christ. We love to thank God we are 'saved'; we sing about it on Sundays but do we ignore the thousands who live all around us on their way to an eternity separated from God, without giving them any warning at all? Let us all find ways to engage with people around us in some way, as God can use every one of us to play some part in seeing them saved.

4. Where are we going?

Let me remind you of the prophecy we had at our week of prayer: Picture a blackboard wiped clean. What has been written in the past does not determine what we will write in the future. Be prepared for God to write new things and to gift us to do things we have never done before.

There are three challenges that will make us more fruitful.

1. Prayer-power. We will be amazed at what God will do amongst us when we pray.
2. Getting to know someone. Imagine if God led each of us to just one person to get to know, love and befriend. We are not going to thrust the gospel down their throats, but we can show interest when the time is right we can say "Come and See".
3. Prepared to nurture. God will only entrust us with his spiritual children, new believers, if we are prepared to look after them when they come to Christ. They can be quite time consuming, like our own kids, but after a while they grow up and stand on their own feet and then we can ask God for someone else to bless with the gospel.

We may feel we **can't** tell them the gospel and lead them to Christ ourselves, but this is why we have CEx and Alpha and have regular gospel Guest meetings. Please think how we can use these with our friends.

So I want to ask

1. Each one of us to review how fruitful we are being personally in helping others to come to know the Lord,
2. All those involved in the ministries of this church to ask if it is being fruitful and consider together how you could readjust things (dig it round and fertilise it) to make it more fruitful. We've got a year to see things turn round and become fruitful.
3. I want to ask all of you who come on a Sunday but are not involved in anything else to pray about how you could get involved and help with these ways in which we serve the community.

Dave is going to come and tell us about how he has done this with Resonate.

During the last 7 years running resonate. We have had some massive highs and in one term over 90 different YP came at least once!

But since last summer numbers have dropped off, the church YP are looking for something different to a youth club to invite their friends to.

We were not seeing the fruit we really longed for! The fig tree picture was relevant for us. What to do? Cut it down and plant something new or fertilize and give it another year?

Well following discussions with the YP we didn't have faith or a vision for a regular youth club and with other people's input the idea of a Sunday evening meeting primarily targeted at Younger People seemed to be the way forward.

So we are starting something new and fresh on Sunday nights.

What will this look like?

The primary focus of the change will be to create an environment attractive and accessible to younger people. A place where they can come and not feel restricted by the environment, a place where they can come and feel comfortable about bringing their friends.

However everyone is welcome, it's not exclusively for young people. We do want to see people in their teens, 20's and 30's coming and finding an expression of church that is not out of the ordinary for them.

We want to create an ordinary environment for people to meet an extraordinary God.

To this end we will create an environment for the "Starbucks Generation" the generation who love to spend time chilling out with their mates in coffee shops. To do this we will be setting up this room to be like a coffee shop, wipe able leather sofas, coffee tables, ambient lighting, music playing. We will serve all sorts of drinks as well as muffins etc.

We will then have about 30 minutes of loud, high praise where people can engage with our great God, where young men feel comfortable and not wierded out. Following this there will be a 30 minute preach from the bible ([2 Tim 4 Says: I give you this charge: ²Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.](#)), people will be sat around coffee tables and on sofas during this.

We could just turn resonate into a coffee bar, but we believe the thing that will really cause this to grow is the praise of God and the preaching of his word. We want to up

the spiritual content for our own Young people as well as for those coming in from the street.

We want to tap into the thousands of people who love in North Ascot and don't or won't come to church.

I also hope to see YP interacting much more with our 20's and 30's. These are the people they will aspire to be like. Sorry parents...

Whilst this is happening, we are aware that some of the young people, the few that we get on a Sunday, will have the opportunity whilst the praise and preach happens to go into the back hall where we will have a mini resonate set up. The doors will be open between rooms so they will be able to come and go as they please.

So where are we now?

Since January we have been running resonate on a fortnightly basis. In the gap weeks, we have been and will continue to take YP and anyone interested to different churches to see what sort of stuff they are doing. We want to go running into this with great excitement and expectancy of what God can do!

We will be launching our new Sunday evening meeting on the 21st March.

If you feel that this is something you are excited about we must pray.

Is this an area of church life you might be able to be fruitful? Speak to me about getting involved.

You may also feel you would like to support this by helping us buy some of the things we need, like sofas and coffee machines, if so please come and speak to me. Some people have already offered to sponsor a sofa or coffee machine.

I'm really excited about what God can do with this new thing and really believe this could be a substantial growth engine for our church.