

# OUR VISION

*“We exist to help people to become fully committed and equipped disciples of Jesus Christ”*

Last Sunday we talked about the importance of vision as we head into a new year as a church – we discovered as we looked at a number of examples in both the Old and New Testament that God given vision introduces us to the big picture – that it doesn’t come as a fully worked out plan – that it sets the direction in which God invites us to travel with him.

But we also took time to think about the importance of God given vision – we saw how vision ...

*Gives us a sense of purpose and direction*

*Inspires us to action* – this outward focus in serving God and others

*Challenges our own limitations* and frees us from the expectations of the past

*Enables change to take place more effectively*

*Literally transforms us* - transforms us into disciples of Jesus ... it moves us from simply maintaining what we have into people who are followers of Jesus that’s what our new HG series is all about equipping people to follow Jesus where they are

*Glories God rather than us* – it points away from us to what God is doing. And moves us forward in a way that honours God rather than satisfying us and our own personal wants and needs.

And this morning we want to take things a step further as we come to think about God’s vision for his church and then to spell out what that might look like for us and for our church family here in Crofton as we move into 2014 and beyond.

I have always been struck by people’s last recorded words – last words always have a kind of poignancy about them and Jesus last recorded words are no exception. Because in them he

gave us a God given vision for his church – here it is – words that for many of us are very familiar.

‘The Jesus came and said to them – all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the HS and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you until the very end of the age.’ (NIV)

*18-20 Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: “God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.” (The Message)*

Here is these few short verses we have through Jesus’ words a God- given vision for his church – a passage which has shaped the vision that God has been giving to us as leaders over recent months as you will see in a few minutes. I expect that like me those of you who grew up in church from an early age can remember the number the times that these verses are used when we are sending people out usually to assignments that are overseas and far from home.

But as I have thought and prayed and talked with the leaders here at CBC over recent months it seems to me that the Great Commission as we sometimes call these verses are more about discipleship than they are about evangelism and overseas mission. That the emphasis that lies at the heart of this God given vision is first and foremost about making and becoming disciples of Jesus Christ.

That’s Jesus God given vision for his worldwide church is all about becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. And that has really challenged my thinking and praying and reading over recent months – and it has also shaped the praying and thinking of our leadership team as we have journeyed together in recent months.

But here it is in black and white – amongst the last recorded words of Jesus – ‘go and make disciples of all nations’ - and in five different ways in the gospels of Matthew, Mark , Luke , John and the book of Acts this is what Jesus has called his church to be and to do .... In five different ways and in five different books we are shown that the vision for God’s church is all about discipleship.

And as leaders at CBC we want to reflect that same heartbeat for God’s church through the vision that God is giving us – ***‘we exist to help all people to become fully committed and equipped disciples of Jesus Christ. A vision that is inspired and shaped by Jesus God given vision for his church’.***

And I want to take some time to unpack this with you this morning. I want us to think together this about this intentional call to discipleship - To think about what it is and what it might look like if we allow this God given vision to shape the future direction of this local church. And then as we conclude to reflect on the nature of our own commitment to growing spiritually as the followers of Jesus Christ. I want to show you how this God given vision can totally re-orientate our understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

**But we need to begin by asking a much more fundamental question – what is a disciple?**

At its simplest a disciple is simply someone who serves as an apprentice under a master. In the gospels Jesus called many people to follow him. People from all walks of life – some were pretty rough around the edges, some were difficult, some were slow to understand, some were cowardly, some had sordid pasts and little reputation.

Basically they were a lot like us – and through the gospel accounts we read that over time a growing group of people begin to devote their lives to Jesus and his ministry – whilst others continued to devote themselves to things like wealth, and power and pleasure, continuing to chase created things rather than the creator of all things.

For over three years Jesus lived and trained people who stuck with him on who he was, on what that meant for them and their world, as they learnt to tell others about him.

And throughout those three years Jesus lived his life with them, he ate and he drank with them, he prayed with them and he taught them what the Bible said. He cried for them and he died for them. And after three years of traveling and learning with Jesus the disciples watched their teacher die on a cross because he claimed to be God.

But this isn't just any story is it – because as we know Jesus rose from the dead victorious over evil, sin and death – and the first thing that he does is to get back to the task of teaching and training his disciples over the many meals and conversations they shared over a period of 40 days.

And just before he left this world to take his rightful place enthroned in heaven Jesus left us with these final words .. and then as we read in Acts Ch. 1 he gave them his HS to help them to live for him in this world.

And it's the simplicity of these words that has shaped our vision as leaders. This is the heartbeat we long for ... a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to his chosen servants ... we want the simplicity of these words to shape us and inspire us we want them to be the reason for our existence .. as we seek to make disciples of all nations, starting with our families, our neighbours, our co-workers and our friends.

The word 'disciple' is rich in meaning and purpose – it's at the very heart of the mission that Jesus himself has given us. Here's a lovely definition of a disciple I came across this week – '*a disciple is someone who is entirely devoted to learning and living for Jesus*'.

You see discipleship according to Jesus is not a programme – it is not a course – it is not some kind of optional extra that we put on for the extra keen – it is quite literally a lifestyle – it is a commitment to a lifestyle following Jesus.

The world in which we live encourages us to follow all kinds of people and organisations and ideas. For example I could very loosely be termed as a follower of Liverpool football club – when they win I am happy for a while and then I get on with the rest of my life – when they lose I am disappointed for a bit and then I get on with life. I am not a hard-core Liverpool fan whose whole life is devoted to following the team where ever they may be playing.

Now contrast my wavering allegiance to a football team with what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Contrast that with a group of twelve men who gave up everything to follow Jesus. Who lived a followers lifestyle, who did all they could to help others, who suffered persecution because their teacher and his ways were so radical and threatening to the religious leaders of their day. For them being a follower of Jesus was an all-consuming passion.

And when Jesus calls us to follow him in that sense this is the calling– someone who is entirely devoted to learning and living for Jesus.

**Following Jesus like this affects every aspect of our lives – let me give you some examples**

***Firstly following Jesus secures our true identity*** – we talked a lot about this at Nathan's induction service .. all of us look to someone or something for our sense of identity – that's just how it is ... for some its careers, education, retirement, children, property, cars .... As disciples of Jesus we are called to find our identity first and foremost in Jesus and him alone. Everything else is secondary to that ... so come to that point where we know that we are saved and kept by the grace of God and our sense of worth comes from knowing that we are deeply loved by God and that nothing that change the love that God has for us.

***Secondly following Jesus re orientates our worship*** – and here we are not talking about the songs we sing in church but about our whole lifestyles - Jesus put it like this where your treasure is there your heart will be - whether we realise it or not we all worship someone or something .. some people worship money or power or pleasure or even the things we consume – it seems that there is an endless stream of things that we can find to devote our worship to in this world.

But as disciples we are called to worship Jesus and him alone – you can see it happening here in Matt 28 when they saw him they worshipped him ... because he alone is worthy of our worship.

**Thirdly following Jesus draws us into a new kind of community.** All of us have been made to be in community with others. In each one is there is there God given desire to love and to be loved, to have to give friendship, to have that place of safety and belonging. These God given desires are essential for becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus trained his first disciples in the context of community – living with them, travelling with them, eating and drinking with them, partying with them ... following Jesus draws us into a new kind of community with all of its imperfections but through it e really can experience glimpses of how things are supposed to be.

**Fourthly following Jesus unites us in a common vision** – that’s what lies at the heart of Jesus God-given vision for his church – to make disciples. All of us long for sense of purpose. The idea that the world in which we live is without meaning grates against every fibre of our being. Followers of Jesus take joy in the fact that God has a purpose for this world- a mission – a vision - that we have been called to participate in. Part of becoming a disciple is being on a mission to make more disciples. We exist to help all people to become fully committed and equipped followers of Jesus Christ.

I love the definition we used earlier ... ‘*a disciple is someone who is entirely devoted to learning and living for Jesus*’. That kind of discipleship secures our identity .. it re orientates our worship .. it draws un into a new kind of community ... it unites us in a common purpose and vision.

If you want to see what that looks like then we need to look no further than the book of Acts be reminded of what a church of devoted followers of Christ looks like. See Acts :2:42-47

We cannot have that kind of experience unless we are fully devoted to the cause. These early disciples were committed to carrying on the teachings of Jesus in word and deed. It’s all here in this passage – a discipleship that secures our identity, re-orientates our worship, draws us into a new kind of community and unites us in a common purpose and vision.

This passage in Acts Ch2 makes it clear that discipleship is not an optional extra, it’s not something that we bolt on to our programmes, it’s not just another activity – discipleship is the heartbeat of God’s church.

Discipleship matters because Jesus modelled it and commanded it. It mattes because discipleship is necessary for the church to become healthy and productive. It matters because we cannot reach our potential without growing spiritually and it matter because we cannot influence the world around us unless we can demonstrate faith based lives that are being transformed.

Here is God’s heartbeat for his church and we believe as leaders that it is to be ours too ... ***we exist to help people to become fully committed and equipped disciples of Jesus Christ.***

**So what might that look like at CBC - what might it mean for us to embrace this vision as a church? Let me try and give you a glimpse ... here's what things might start to look like ..**

*A church that worships God every day of the week (not just on Sundays)*

*Church that equips you to live for Jesus where you are*

*Encouraging everyone to get involved in an appropriate small group*

*Encouraging everyone to get involved in a community group / activity outside of church*

*A commitment to personal spiritual growth through the regular reading of God's word (applying what we learn)*

*Individuals who joyfully share their resources for the sake of the kingdom of God and for the care of others*

*A deep commitment to building a lasting and life changing community among those who want to follow Jesus*

*Hearts that are sensitive to sin and wounded every time they do something that offends God.*

*Learning to share our faith in Christ in natural and unforced ways*

*People who live differently from the norm because of their faith*

*Spontaneous demonstrations of compassion towards those who are in need*

*Complete submission to the Holy Spirit in both decision making and behaviour*

*Believers who take the initiative to use their gifts and skills for the benefit of their church without having to be cajoled into serving.*

*A church that projects and lives up to the image of being a church that loves God. follows Jesus and serves others.*

Does that whet your appetite this morning – a church full, not of members, but of true disciples – men, women, young people and children committed to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and growing in their knowledge and experience of him day by day.

***We exist to help people to become fully committed and equipped disciples of Jesus Christ.***

People whose articulated purpose in life to fulfil the great commission. Jesus God-given vision for his church.

Maybe some of you look at all this today and you think no way – it's just a pipe dream – it's just wishful thinking – this can never be. Maybe you have heard sermons like this before and you and no longer moved and inspired by Jesus vision for his church.

Then let me leave you with two very persuasive reasons as we conclude as to why I believe we can live up to God's calling to this kind of discipleship.

**Firstly take a look at church history** – two thousand years ago Jesus turned the world upside down by gathering a bunch of the twelve most unlikely group of disciples around him. Disciples whom he trained to infiltrate their culture with a life changing, life giving message – disciples who were quite literally prepared to die for what they believed about Jesus. No buildings no budgets, no programmes, no form of mass media and yet they built the foundations for what has become the largest faith group in the world. Can you think of any reason why the church of today cannot have an even greater impact than this small group of early believers.

**Secondly we need to consider the heart of God.** God's whole purpose in creating mankind was for the purpose of knowing, loving and serving him. John 3:16,17.

It's a huge task and it's a big vision – but let's remind ourselves how Jesus both started and ended his earthly ministry ... the Spirit of the Lord is on me to proclaim good news ... all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me – but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses .. friends we are not in this on our own. Through the power of the HS God has given us all we need to accomplish the task of shaping a God fearing and worshipping community. We are without excuse.

Which leaves us with one final but inevitable question this morning - Jesus said go and make disciples – it doesn't get much clearer than that does it – ***we exist to help people to become fully committed and equipped disciples of Jesus Christ'***.

So let me ask you as we conclude – would you be willing to make three serious commitments in response to God's word to us this morning – as disciples of Jesus Christ will you ...

**Will you rely on God's power through the HS?** We must commit to relying on God – this is a battle we cannot win in our own strengths and abilities. We must lean heavily on his resources and his power and his strength.

**Will you commit to personal spiritual growth?** Secondly we must commit to personal spiritual growth – even if that means some uncomfortable or unexpected changes in our lives .. applying what we learn.

**Will you recognise that we are in this together?** The church is not a private individual experience – we are in this together. We must be willing to minimise ourselves for the good of the whole, that means using our gifts and abilities in harmony with other for the benefit of the church at large.

*(Transcript Notes from a sermon preached by Adrian Judd on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014)*