

Vision Vicar



August 15, 2010

5



Vision

from Latin ~ ~ ~

something that is
or has been seen;

discernment

or perception;

intelligent foresight;

The way in which
one sees something.

Vicar

from 'vicarious

acting 'in the place of';

an agent for a superior;

a representative.

Grace and Peace

What solid, dependable, and internally satisfying words they are, 'grace' and 'peace'. Just the sort of words for a bit of a rest and a holiday period ... or maybe not! Actually, both these words in the Bible are active, powerful, demonstrative and, at times, quite hard work which can only be done depending on Christ's mighty power at work within us (Colossians 1:29)

Grace looks outward to others in attitude and service without any thought of reward. Peace challenges the usual ways of the world – individually and corporately – and demonstrates the power of the Kingdom as the things of heaven break out on earth through God's people.

So, as Paul says at the beginning of his letter to the church in Colossae – which he is writing from prison – "May God our Father give you grace and peace"

And that's where we start this autumn as we step on together in faith, hope and love. As church we have much grace and peace to give as we have received.

So, here is my latest letter to you all – I have tried being 'vexed' and even 'vacant' in these fairly irregular bits of correspondence, but now I am definitely full of 'vision' again following a restful sabbatical and a review of the journey so far and the path ahead with Christ in me, you and us, the hope of glory!

Faith and Hope

Both these words are also heavy with much deeper meaning than we might think. We are people of Christian faith living lives of faith – "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1) – and our hope is confident in Jesus who has secured our lives with Him now and forever. Looking around our culture we can see that both faith and hope are very insecure in a world that seeks its own answers in people, politics and programmes. Only Jesus has the answer to the problem and faith and hope are only secure in Him – eternally!

As disciples of Jesus, we are entrusted with this faith and hope for ourselves and for others. If I'm honest, I would say that the thing that saddens me most about my own discipleship and the wider church at large, is that we are not bubbling over with the amazing good news and new life available to everyone who comes to Jesus to receive it. We are more reticent and reluctant than excited and enthusiastic. But this faith and hope in Jesus is exactly what the world needs and we have it to give – "Christ in us, the hope of glory" as Paul tells the church in Colossians 1:27 – but for all sorts of reasons (often excuses!) we find it difficult to share this critical, life-saving message with those floundering around in the world which offers them nothing secure forever.

One of the most common things I hear people say when I ask who they will be bringing to the next Alpha Supper is, "I don't really have any friends who are not Christians already." So, this autumn ... let's make some new friends! Who lives next door? Who works alongside you? Who do you meet quite often in the shop, the bar, the college, the club, the class or in the street? Who can you start praying for now ... and look for the opportunities to talk with more often, invite round for tea, arrange to meet later and develop a new friendship?

As you develop new friendships, share stories, find out about each other and listen to the way life is working out, you will inevitably be sharing some of your story of faith in Jesus and hope forever ... and then, maybe you could bring your friend to the amazing Alpha Supper in January.

We'll delay the start of the Alpha Course until January to give us 4 months to make new friends!

"We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all God's people which come from your confident hope ...

This same Good News ... is bearing fruit by changing lives as it changed yours ...

But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it ...

And this is the secret: Christ lives in you.

This gives you assurance of sharing his glory ...

Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him.

Then your faith will grow ...

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, not the things of earth ...

Let the rich message of Christ fill you.

Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives.

Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts ...

do everything as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father."

bits of Colossians 1-3

Love and Blessing

Sue and I were privileged to lead a seminar at the New Wine Summer Conference in Newark back in July – after spending a couple of great days with all those young people at Soul Survivor! We were sharing the principle of blessing the community, changing the perception of church, and preparing the atmosphere for spiritual breakthrough. Obviously, the thing most people wanted to hear about was ‘Party-in-the-Park’ and how it set the foundation for sharing the good news of Jesus in the community throughout the rest of the year. It was good to hear other stories of how churches are turning the perception round in their communities and the sort of encounters that then come about in the following weeks and months.

The two prophetic pictures of STK church becoming both ‘hub’ and ‘sharehouse’ are crucial to our way forward together at the moment. In some ways both these pictures define what the church has always been – a warm and welcoming place and people willing to give and serve others – but in a new way, with a sense of greater faith and trust in God and the work of His Spirit in and through us, we are seeing these two critical Kingdom ministries of love and blessing bear fruit through whole-hearted commitment to who we are, what we are called to, and what God will do through us as we dedicate ourselves to worship, fellowship and outreach.

Up, In and Out – Worship, Fellowship and Outreach – the shape of members of STK

As usual, this autumn we will be digging-in the vision and giving pointers for the journey ahead. As members of the church we are all on a journey together with four key objectives before us:

- 1 Wholehearted commitment to being a disciple of Jesus – first and foremost to worship (serve) Him above everything else.
- 2 Wholehearted commitment to each other – loving, supporting, challenging (meeting each other’s needs) and helping one another
- 3 Wholehearted commitment to others – giving above receiving, serving above being served, sharing the good news in word & deed
- 4 Wholehearted commitment to our community – the specific mission-field given to STK in the north of Kendal

There are other objectives mixed in to these – and you have probably thought of one or two that you would like to see in my key list above! – but these four are the ones we are pursuing together not in our own strength but in the power and leading of the Holy Spirit in us individually and together as a church. As we look to extending the Kingdom of God in Kendal and beyond, we are relying on the Spirit to work through us to proclaim and demonstrate the natural and supernatural ways of God who Himself is committed to these four key objectives for you, me and us together! Where are you on this journey? It’s OK to be anywhere on it as long as you’re on it!

Giving it all

I use the word ‘wholehearted’ with a concern for the ‘fainthearted’. This discipleship journey is 100% full on – which is both exciting and daunting – and calls on the whole of our lives. We are called to give everything to it, even give things up for it, and to step on in faith with endurance for both the good (the glory) and the bad (the suffering). The joys, delights, wonders and rewards are great but they are mixed in with the trials, struggles, disappointments and suffering that Jesus said would be part of our journey as it was His.

But, in the midst of it all, we will discover the truth that to give is better than to receive. It’s just true ... and quite a lot of fun too!

We have the usual challenges to giving ahead – giving time, talents and treasure (thankfully!) – and we have all the usual vacancies in our groups, tasks, activities, events ... as well as the church bank account! Look out for a new ‘blessing-fund’ over and above the general ‘tithing-fund’ ... I think this could be quite a joyful expression of thanksgiving and praise as we journey on together.

Success to Significance

I am challenged by the question of what difference it would make if the church wasn’t there. I am often flattered by the many comments about STK – the life and service in the community, the gatherings we have, the disciples we grow, the prayers we pray – and I hear other leaders comment on how successful the church is. But, don’t worry, I’m not much impressed by these things (a bit encouraged but not impressed!) because success is vastly different from significance. My personal vision is for everyone in my parish to know and love God, to be saved by Jesus and to be serving Him fully (wholeheartedly) as they grow and go out to speak and act powerfully full of His Spirit every day in every way ... Now that would be significant – for Kendal and beyond! This can only come about through prayer and a willingness to speak and act obediently as God, who promises to be with me, to make His will known to me, to give me spiritual wisdom and understanding, will simply work through me powerfully, extraordinarily, supernaturally ... and significantly. What’s your personal vision? And how does it connect in well with our corporate vision that God has given us?

Opportunities ahead

Opportunities for grace and mercy, faith and hope, love and blessing, giving and giving. Opportunities for worship, fellowship and outreach. Opportunities to make new friends, to share our faith-stories, to serve without thought of reward, to give without expecting to receive. Opportunities to sit still with God, to stand and worship Him, to tune our ears to hear Him, to train our eyes to see Him, to listen to His leading and to obey as He sends us to people, gives us words to say and actions to do to bring something of heaven to earth every day. May God bless you and us and our community as we make the most of every opportunity He gives us to make Him known in everything we say and everything we do as He works powerfully through us.

Grace, peace, faith, hope, love and blessing to you all ... for the journey ahead.