**Vision Sunday 2018**

**Introduction**

The last time I came to you to cast “Vision”, I concluded with the following:

*“In the past, evangelical Christians have shied away from the “social gospel”, the dangers having been justification by works and / or liberalism in theology. If we have faith and commitment to trust in Christ, we need to show our faith in a real way; to do and to say are both needed. If we just help those in need without a reason for the “hope within us,” then it will always just be works. To quote John Piper: “Don’t Waste Your Life” – “Why don’t people ask us about our hope? The answer is probably that we look as if we hope in the same things they do”. In today’s world we can become ensnared by two dangers, that can hinder meeting the needs of those who are poor; one is wealth with pride and the other is wealth with materialism. As a Church we are committed to fulfilling all that God has said to us in Isaiah 58, regarding true worship; rather than what our preferences might be.*

*Galatians 2:10 exhorts us to be responsible to those inside the Church as well as those outside of it, [see 2Cor. 8,9, note Gal. 6:10]. In our dealings as a church we need to continue to be:*

1. *Generous [Acts.2:44-45]*
2. *Fair [Acts:6]*
3. *Truthful about our money and finance [15% of all Jesus said was about money]*
4. *Show equality in the way we distribute and give [2Cor.8: 13-15]*

*As a body of believers, our response is crucial in a number of ways. Like the widow who gave all she had, was Jesus saying: Give it all away”? Of course not. He was saying, “Do you possess faith-filled risk for the glory of God?” Therefore, we need to take ownership of wider spheres, {e.g. Romania, Liberia}; be generous, merciful, encouraging, hospitable, and challenge lifestyles to be Christ- like.”*

I went on further to say:

*“What then does this mean for us?*

1. *The gospel will free people from rejection, fear and shame; write and tell your story. We need parents and grandparents in Christ; will you and I be one? Mothers to daughters in Christ, will you be one? Fathers to sons in Christ, will I be one? True prosperity includes protection, assurance and well- being in mind, body and soul. If the gospel is really working itself out in our lives, God will give us intellectual, creative and social fulfilment.*
2. *Christ reveals to us our earthly destiny and funds it! Prosperity is not a matter of what we have in the bank. It is what we have access to; see what Paul says in Phil. 4:19, if we are doing what He asks.*
3. *The Message of the Bible as a whole will grip us and keep us in His grip. We will hunger for reality and be spiritually alive on a diet of revealed truth*
4. *The need is for Givers Not Takers! 2Cor.9:6-8 – there’s more. We need the Kingdom Principle – Matthew 5: 13-16.”*

As a Church we have been driven over the last few years by the words of Isaiah 58. That is to be a Church that will seek after those who are disadvantaged, hungry, in need of hope. For us as a Church they were clear life-defining words [as Phil Wilthew from Bedford Kings Arms puts it]. However, God works on us through seasons and there are times when we need to hear and have season shaping words over our lives and as a Church. What are those words we need to hear for ourselves today? I have never been content to just “do Church” and settle for the “status quo”, which I’ve always taken to mean “the mess we are now in”. What I really want is for a move of God’s Holy Spirit who comes to help you and I not only turn the world upside down but to be turned upside down myself!

Am I hearing His voice?

* Listening to His voice is what makes our souls live: *“Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live”* [Is.55v3]*.*
* Being able to hear His voice is what marks us out as His people, sheep of His pasture: *“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger’s voice”* [Jn.10vv4,5].
* Hearing Him is like eating daily bread, which feeds the deepest needs of our spirit: “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” [Matt.4v4].
1. **A Church that desires the Prophetic**

Paul instructs us to desire prophesy above all other gifts because it strengthens and builds up the Church:

*“Try to excel in gifts that build up the Church”* [1Cor.14v12]

When we hear God accurately, we become strong.

We need those who will prophesy so that the Kingdom of God is increased so that, we hear messages and secrets of the Kingdom. And that those who prophesy, understand Kingdom intention, as they do so in faith and in love. This is an Ephesians 4 ministry that is designed to equip and build up the body. God still wants “Body Builders” today. No spiritual gift has been withdrawn or ceased in the Church, as far as I understand the Bible; but that, we should seek after the best that God has on offer for us. Of course, nothing should contradict the written word, but we need to hear the voice of God through prophetic revelation also.

*“Hearing the Shepherd is not a gift reserved for a few prophetically minded sheep. It is for all who know the Shepherd. But this God-given inheritance needs nurture and activation. A million-pound investment has been made in the bank account of our soul, but it takes some deliberate steps to start drawing down what has already been deposited there.” [Developing Prophetic Culture – Phil Wilthew]*

The questions I would like to ask us are:

* Do I have the courage to say yes and yes again?
* Do I have the courage to fail?
* Do I have the courage to break barriers?
* Do I have courage to face the giants?
* Do I have the courage that flows through me from Jesus?
1. **A Church that is willing to pray**

The Bible makes it abundantly clear:

*“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” [2Chron.7v14]*

Prayer is conditional – How can God heal our land, if we ourselves have no humility, pray, seek His face, turn from our wicked ways? In other words, esteem others higher than ourselves, talk to Him yes but also listen and obey first. Go the extra mile with Him, and finally be prepared to continually change and be changed by His Grace as we have already been called by name.

The Bible is littered throughout with verses on prayer: Prov.15v8,29; Matt.21v22; Mk.9v29, 11v24; Ac.1v14, 2v42, 6v4; Rom.12v12; 1Cor.7v5; 2Cor.13v9; Eph.6v18; Phil.4v2; 1Tim.4v5; Jam.5v15. To name but a few.

*“What is life if we have not life together”* [T.S.Eliot]

Jeff Lucas in his book: “How Not to Pray”, makes the point that*, a praying Church is God’s gift to a lonely planet. The invitation to come in from the cold, in a culture of arctic techno-isolation, is God’s loving call to a shivering humanity. But the fireside will only be warm in the Church that knows how to engage with God in worship and prayer.*

Too many in the Church of today look for the consumer Church, that will satisfy their needs etc., whilst that is not necessarily wrong in itself; the fundamental thing about God is that He is still looking for people who will say: “Not my will be done, but yours O Lord”.

Church is not primarily a feeding centre there to meet my needs, it was planted so the world in isolation might know and understand that, “You are loved, you are **really** loved”. That is why it is necessary for us to be a praying Jesus centred Church because it was never needed more so now, in a world that doesn’t understand real-truth, because it has evaluated truth as being a mere fact of what you and I as individuals conceive it to be, because it can be true for you. If that then is the case let’s all make 2+2=5 or when you put your hand in the fire it won’t burn because you don’t believe it will! Utter nonsense of course. Everything in life carries a consequence, even what you choose to believe or don’t believe.

The Church will only grow when it is found in Unity, purpose, prayer and precept; [by growth, I don’t mean transfer growth]. Not more evangelism, not more activity, not more social action but when we do battle with that that is not flesh and blood but principalities and powers; that raging, seeking to destroy family values and meaningful purpose in life. The world needs: “The scent of love”:

*“The early church grew not because of the spiritual gifts of Christians such as speaking in tongues and not because it was a palatable doctrine but because they had discovered to secret of community. Generally, they didn’t have to lift a finger to evangelise. Someone would be walking down a back alley in Corinth or Ephesus and see a group of people sitting together talking about the strangest things – something about a man and a tree, and an execution and an empty tomb. What they were talking about made no sense to the onlooker. But then there was something about the way they spoke to one another, about the way they cried together, the way they laughed together, the way they were with each other that was strangely appealing. It gave off the scent of love. The onlooker would start to drift farther down the alley; only to be pulled back to this little group like a bee to a flower. He would listen some more, still not understanding, and start to drift away again. But again, he would be pulled back, thinking, I don’t have the slightest idea what these people are talking about, but whatever it is, I want part of it”* [Keith Miller – The Scent of Love]. **O God revive your Church, send your Holy Spirit! Teach us to pray because prayer changes things.**

1. **A Church that loves Young People**

Part of our strategy in prayer needs to focus on the needs of and the reaching out to children and young people. One of the biggest fallacies in the Church at large today is that the young people are the Church of tomorrow. Actually, they are the Church of today. If we do not invest in our children and young people, we will not just stagnate as a Church, but we will die. A healthy Church has people right across the age range. There are many exhortations in the Bible concerning the young.

* Your young men shall see visions [Ac.2v17]
* Don’t let any one look-down on you because you are young [1Tim.4v12]
* Young men in the same way be submissive to those who are older [1Pet.5v5]
* I write to you young men [1Jn.2v13]
* Treat younger men as brothers [1Tim.5v1]
* Then they can train the young women [Titus2v4]
* Flee the evil desires of youth [2Tim.2v22]
* Remember your Creator in the days of your youth [Ecc.12v1]
* How can a young man keep his way pure? [Ps.119v9]

The great need in any Church is to encourage young people continuously, build them up spiritually, demonstrate humility to them. Help them find their place in His Kingdom, give them slack when they fall or fail, judge not lest you be judged. Love them into the Kingdom, take a chance on them. Esteem them then they will esteem you. Love them and they will love you. Correct them without being harsh. Teach them by being teachable yourself. Be gracious and they will find grace. Invest time, effort and resources in them. We need Spiritual Grandparents, Mothers and Fathers. Don’t criticize from afar, put your arms of love around them spiritually. Young people have always been more impressed by what they see rather than what they hear. Young people themselves need to be encouraged to watch and learn and we need patience and the grace of God to help them get there.

1. **A Church that Invests in Others**

There is currently a need here for us to look to the future, it is imperative that we encourage ministries and develop leadership here at New St. Very recently someone brought a word of prophesy to me with this very thought in mind. It was based upon the word of God found in 1Chron.28 and 29. Unknown to them I myself felt directed to someone this past year or so with the very same word for them. I am not going to go on forever or even that much longer! I believe that God has something better for us as a Church and am excited for it’s future. We have some budding talent and gifted people in this Church. I feel it is my responsibility to begin to hand over the mantle to others. With this in view I am currently spending time [hopefully meaningful] with some of the younger men in the Church, in order to help them discover, nurture, grow their giftings as potential leaders for the not too distant future. I have always believed in the 2Tim.2v2 principle:

*“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others”.*

The younger women are not exempt from this and it must be noticeable to some of you that there are some whom I am seeking to encourage in their giftings also. You may feel that god has given you a particular gifting or talent that has not yet been recognised; if this is the case share your heart with someone in leadership, let your gift make room for you, if there is something there, God can use it will happen. It is important that we seek to move on in the things of God. Would that the Holy Spirit gifts become more evident in our Church. Eagerly desire spiritual gifts, ask and it shall be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened. There is a work for Jesus that you can do start small, be faithful in little but think big. Let the Holy Spirit open your heart and mind to do what He has prepared beforehand for you to do.