

APCM

Monday 30 May 2022

Looking Ahead

(being recorded)

Since we arrived here last summer, one of the questions I've been thinking and praying about is: **J** what's next for Christ Church?

The problem is, I'm not a fan of vision statements or five-year plans – some good can come of them, but too often they look and sound great, then nothing ever really happens, nothing changes.

But it's good to keep an eye on what's coming, like scanning the horizon. There will be some challenges. The diocesan strategy is called People and Places, and a major part of that is joining churches into bigger groups to reduce the number of clergy – I don't know yet how that will impact Christ Church.

With the wider Church of England, Christ Church will need to have conversations about marriage, sexuality, and gender. People feel differently about those things, and can get very angry – along with at least one other local church we had signs put on our doors last week saying this is not a safe place for LGBTQ+ people.

Jesus

Those are a couple of the more difficult things – the more positive side of looking head is to ask, what should our vision be? And personally, I think all churches should have the same vision: **J** Jesus. In Hebrews we read **J**:

J let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.

Hebrews 12.1-2 (NIV)

It sounds trite, obvious – we’re a church, *of course* Jesus is our vision. Except – is he *really*?

Sometimes Christians can think we’re looking at Jesus but we’re actually looking at ourselves, a fake, easy Jesus who is terribly nice but not the Jesus we read about in the Bible.

Sometimes churches end up little more than a community charity – doing all sorts of good and wonderful things, but pushing Jesus to the side, leaving him for the bit on a Sunday morning. He becomes an added extra, not the main thing.

I don’t want Christ Church to fall into either of those traps. Jesus should be to us like **J** words in a stick of rock – it doesn’t matter where you look, he’s there, in the centre, all the way through.

Making, Growing, Sending

With all that in mind – how can we keep our focus on Jesus, how can we make sure he’s the main thing – I went to the last words in Matthew §:

Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on 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 Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

Matthew 28.18-20 (NIV)

Jesus had spent three years with his friends. He called them out of their old life and into a new one: § he **made** them into disciples.

Then he taught them in big groups and little groups § so they **grew** in understanding, gifts, confidence, ministry – with Jesus they did things they could never have done before.

And then § he **sent** them out into the world to do what he had done with *them*: to **make disciples of all nations**.

That was the pattern of Jesus’ ministry and I believe it should be the pattern of what we do, too §:

making growing sending disciples of Jesus

I commend those six words to you. I think they capture the way Jesus called his first disciples, and the great commission he gave to them and us to go and do the same: **making, growing, sending disciples of Jesus.**

We are called and commanded by Jesus to **make new disciples**, to talk about Jesus, to share our faith, to teach others about God's best way of life. That might be through a course like Alpha or – much more likely – many conversations with a friend.

We are called and commanded by Jesus to **grow as disciples**. So many of his parables are about growing things – because healthy things grow. We need to be rooted in Jesus. That might be through discovering a new gift, or a new commitment to spend a few minutes dedicated to prayer and reading the Bible every day, or having the confidence to use the talents he has already given.

We are called and commanded by Jesus to go, we **send** each other and **are sent** out into the world. God may send us to a new ministry, maybe even to another country. I hope he doesn't send too many of us away like that (!) – but he is sending *all* of us to wherever we spend most of our time – which is not in here.

making growing sending disciples of Jesus

What's Next

In September I will be leading an away day for PCC, staff, Ministry Team and other leaders. We will be asking ourselves one main question: how can Christ Church be more like a stick of rock, with Jesus running through the centre of all we do?

My hope is that those six words will help us do that in two ways:

1. First, to see where perhaps we have lost sight of Jesus and what he has called and commanded us to do.
2. Second, to decide what we need to do about that, what we need to change and what we need to keep the same.

I commend those six words and that question to the whole church over the summer. Please chat to one another, think and pray about them, and if you have any thoughts, questions, comments, please let me know – it would be helpful if they filter through to me eventually, and I will feed those in to the away day.

I'd like to end with a prayer – so let us pray.