

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : February 24th, 2019  
“Second Sunday before Lent”

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**LAUNCH OF THE VISION 2019 PART 2 – 24 FEBRUARY 2019**

In his sermon a few weeks ago Richard Lane, the previous Vicar, encouraged us to move on, move forward – not live in the past – but to grasp the opportunities which lie ahead. This chimed in so neatly with what we did last Sunday – launching our new Christ Church Vision and Mission Action Plan on which a number of people have been working since our Vision Day. On that day in September we used a phrase created many years ago by Robert Warren in his book ‘The Healthy Churches Handbook’. He identified 7 marks which characterise a healthy church:

*A healthy church is one that is energised by faith; with an outward-looking focus; that seeks to find out what God wants; faces the cost of change and growth; operates as a community; makes room for all and finally does a few things and does them well.*

And it was this last phrase that we held at the forefront of our minds last September. It is all too easy for a church to try to be all things to all people, to stretch itself too far – which can simply result in the exhaustion and burn out of its members amongst other things. So it was that we spent the first part of our day developing our vision and the second part developing our mission action plan – our MAP that will guide us over the next 3 to 5 years or so. A great deal of work and discussion and prayer has gone into all this and it was good that Tish and Naomi were able to share with you last Sunday morning the thinking that has gone into our vision with you all.

So our new vision is '**SHARING GOD'S LOVE**' from which 3 things flow: **Walking in faith together, Welcoming strangers and friends, Working for our community.**

That's our vision. Now the Mission Action Plan – or MAP – is what we are going to use to guide us. The MAP is not set in stone – it is a living document which may change and develop as the months go on. Some bits may happen quite quickly – others may evolve more slowly – and some we may find we can't do at all. But that is the nature of this kind of exercise. There is lots more we could try to do – but we wanted to do a few things and do them well.

But let's try and unpack what it means 'Sharing God's Love'. I wonder what it says to you? There will be many varied answers. I think it says to me that many of us – perhaps all of us – at some time or other might have felt or experienced the love that we know with certainty can only have come from God. It might be a whole host of things: to some it might be the birth of a child, being part of a church community, receiving a little bit of care from someone, the happiness of a newly married couple, the humbling privilege to share together in communion week by week. To others it might be a piece of music, or a beautiful sunset or the view from a deserted beach.

Sometime words can speak of God: many people love Psalm 121: 'I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth'. Some of what our children share with us at the end of Junior Church can only come from God. Like the other Sunday when they were thinking about Jesus instruction to his disciples after they had been fishing 'from now on we'll be catching people'. They drew the sea of Galilee with lots of fish swimming about – but in the middle was a great net which had caught people – people who might be encouraged by us as we go about 'SHARING GOD'S LOVE' and who were caught. Have a proper look at this on the table at the back. It is really amazing – sentiments that could only have come from God via the thoughts and ideas of our young people.

So SHARING GOD'S LOVE is our new vision statement and everything we do at Christ Church should try to echo that. I hope that you will feel you can really be part this vision and that the phrase will both speak to you and inspire you. I do hope so. It certainly feels to me after nearly two years amongst you that we have come up with three words that do describe succinctly what we should be about at Christ Church.

But what about the wider community? What will they make of it? I hope that when people see our vision banner displayed outside that they would get that this is what the people of Christ Church are about – 'Sharing God's Love'. It might not speak to them in the same way that it does to us but hopefully they would drive past the church and say to themselves – there is a congregation of Christians who are working out in the community to share the love of God – not just keeping it all to themselves.

It has been long recognised that to be of any value a slogan must be pithy, to the point and readily understood by the wider community. There are many examples of slogans which people read and think 'eh?' 'what'? Like the diocese which talks of being 'committed to growing and encouraging the whole people of God to be the people God has created us to be'. Or what on earth would the ordinary passer-by make of 'Restoring his reputation'? Or the inadvisable message from an American church 'Honk if you love Jesus – text while driving if you want to meet him'.

No I would humbly suggest to you that our vision 'Sharing God's Love' which has slowly evolved over a period of months after much thought, prayer and countless e-mail exchanges is one that we can offer with humble confidence to God and to the wider community in which we are set as we seek to be Walking in faith together, Welcoming both strangers and friends and Working for our community'.

*Bless O Lord the worship and work of Christ Church as we share God's love, walking in faith together, welcoming both strangers and friends and working for our community, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*