

It's Time to Start Running

Repeat after me: its time to start running

That's right – I'm trialling a new kind of new year's resolution that you don't make until the end of January – that way you have a fighting chance of not breaking it before the month is out.

I'm also kicking off a short series this week around vision. The following weeks will dive a little deeper into the what's and how's of our vision as a church – and these are **not** to be missed – but today I'd like to look at what vision means in our context and consider our motivation – our WHY – and reveal what our vision looks like today.

“Write the vision
And make *it* plain on tablets,
That he may run who reads it.
3 For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time;
But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
Because it will surely come,
It will not tarry.

Habbakuk 2:2-3

Write the vision – and make it plain. That is where we'll be going over the next few weeks.
So that we may run with it.

It's time to start running.

And running with **vision** is vital. We need to see where we are going. Without vision people cast off restraint, run amok – other translations say perish. Proverbs 29

Vision brings alignment – and vision brings hope.

I've heard vision described as a clear mental picture of what could be..... fuelled by a heart conviction that it should be

Without vision people may perish but with vision people – and groups of people - can thrive

Vision is not just for the elite. A clear vision carries within it an invitation to all of us to get on board

OK I was joking about resolutions but January is often a time where there is a combination of reflection and anticipation. I know of several churches both here and further afield who are also using today to cast vision. There's definitely something in the air.

We are going to be talking vision today. But come as you are. Come expectant. Come

alive!

If you are anything like me you'll understand the thrill of novelty. Hearing, seeing, reading something new. New year new me. All of that.

We do it in church too. Latest worship music, latest thinking and books, latest prophetic podcast, latest church growth strategies.....all good stuff, But.....

It can be exhausting. And it can also be distracting. What has God called you – called US – to do? Can we just concern ourselves with that?

Last year a friend of mine shared a thought with his church. Instead of looking for the next thing in isolation what if we were encouraged to look again? What if there were layers? God was in the year just past, and the one before that. He is with us now. He is in our future. What has he been consistently showing us? What is he drawing us deeper into?

It is exactly 3 yrs ago to the day that I also stood here and preached a message from Isaiah 43

18 “Do not remember the former things,
Nor consider the things of old.

19 Behold, I will do a new thing,
Now it shall spring forth;
Shall you not know it?
I will even make a road in the wilderness
And rivers in the desert.

I remember being gripped by the image of flowers growing in the Namibian desert.

Who knew what was coming? Nobody was talking about covid that day. But within weeks the whole country was in lockdown. Schools workplaces and churches were closed. The former things, the ways of old, had gone. And yet God made a way in the wilderness. We met on zoom for most of 2020. I think a lot of credit is also due to Aaron for his quick thinking during this time. A brief respite then back into lockdown at the start of 2021. There was provision – sometimes miraculous – and rivers in the desert. We began the process of opening up and re establishing our meeting but we should remember full restrictions were not lifted until Easter last year.

Bible scholars think that Isaiah 43 was written to an Israel that was stuck somewhere between its past and its future. Right in the middle of the Babylonian exile. Aware of its past with God but lacking hope for it's future. Fascinating when you look again and realise that we read it immediately prior to our two year Covid exile. Layers eh?

I remember this verse being everywhere I looked in the weeks before I spoke. Every podcast I listened to, every Instagram post I saw Isaiah 43 was there.

And something similar has happened to me in recent weeks.

Isaiah 54:2-3 now

'Enlarge the place of your tent,
stretch your tent curtains wide,
do not hold back;
lengthen your cords,
strengthen your stakes.

3 For you will spread out to the right and to the left;
your descendants will dispossess nations
and settle in their desolate cities.

Now this was a scripture I heard a lot when I started at this church. 25 yrs ago

A friend quoted it recently, then an online sermon, then Insta, then a Facebook live, then I got home and Gill was listening to something and the same scripture again

'Enlarge the place of your tent,
stretch your tent curtains wide,
do not hold back;
lengthen your cords,
strengthen your stakes

.....maybe God trying to get my attention again but I'm not sure.....:)

Recently I've had to spend a bit of time on my business. We have been changing direction slightly and focussing more on house extensions and alterations. It seems to be where people are focussing their attention and their resources. And I've been kind of busy with this work.

Finally I sat down to look again at this scripture. But for some reason it was the New Living Translation that I got to first.

2 "Enlarge your house; build an addition.
Spread out your home, and spare no expense!
3 For you will soon be bursting at the seams.

I had to read it twice. Enlarge your house. Build an addition.
Speak Lord your servant is listening. It **is** time to build. AMEN!

So now we are building? I've only just got used to it being time to start running.....

Whether we are running with the vision or building with a vision the thing I would note is that we are always MOVING. Standing still is no longer an option.

My favourite quote related to vision is the one attributed to Thomas Edison:

"VISION WITHOUT EXECUTION IS HALLUCINATION"

In other words if we say we have vision and do nothing with it we are kidding ourselves.

Its time to build.

One of my favourite scriptures from last year is found in Ephesians 2. We quoted it several times as we finally met together without restrictions. A major highlight of the last couple of years is the number of new people who have found us online even in our exile from the building.

Ephesians 2:19-22 MSG

You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You **belong** here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

Did you catch it? The first step is belonging. Much of the last year has been about belonging. You belong here.

The next step is building.

Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

Notice it is God who is building, it's all his plan – but we are invited to play our part.

Earlier in Ephesians 2 Paul writes this:

we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, **work we had better be doing**.

We are invited to join in the building – the good work he he's gotten us ready to do.

BELONGING – BUILDING – AND BECOMING.....the new creation spoken of in 2 Cor 5

And on that timeline – today – we have arrived at building.

Now just before we jump into the building plans – which the architect in me is SCREAMING to do – can the pastoral voice also make a suggestion?

When the scripture says:

Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide,
do not hold back...

Perhaps it is also talking to our hearts. Can we open our hearts? To Jesus? To his children? Can we live generously? Can we live open handed? Not grasping tightly to what we claim as ours but knowing we are held tightly by the Father who claims us as his own?

It's time to build.....

Over the next few moments I want to take a closer look at the exile in Babylon - and how the people built back.

The story is picked up in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah in the old testament around 5 centuries BC. Jerusalem has been defeated and the people taken into captivity. There next follows the stories of three men across the period of a couple of generations.

Again I don't have much time here this morning but I'd really suggest you look again at these chapters.

In Ezra 1 God prompted King Cyrus to allow Zerubbabel and his men to return to rebuild the altar and the the temple. Cyrus even provided resources. This re-established worship in Jerusalem.

Note that – point 1 - worship

By the time we get to Ezra 7 some time later King Artaxerxes is prompted by God to allow Ezra to return to Jerusalem and again he provides resources and his backing. Ezra is a priest and teacher of the law. It is his mission to build up the people and the community and bring spiritual reformation and transformation to the people.

Note that – point 2 - transformation

Eventually in Nehemiah 1 King Artaxerxes is prompted by God to allow Nehemiah to also return to Jerusalem. Again with his blessing, protection and provision. Amazing how God can find for us all we need to fulfill his vision even from the most unlikely sources. Nehemiah's concern was for the city. For its gates, and doors and walls. He knew it was ruined and in disgrace and this broke his heart. He wanted to see the city restored, and blessed and thriving.

Note that – point 3 – bless the city

A vision of return, rebuilding and restoration in 3 parts:

The first part is worship and the presence of God. Zerubbabel restored the altar and the temple. The first action here is upward. Its about restoring relationship and connection with God. And its all about worship

The second part is teaching of the law. Ezra was about rebuilding the community – the family of believers through God's word. The action here is inward. It is about spiritual formation and transformation and unity. And it is about connection with one another

The third part is rebuilding the city so that it can thrive. This was Nehemiah's concern. That

the city would be safe and prosperous. This action is outward and speaks of relationships between God's people and those around them. And the intention to bless.

There are layers here.

When we look again at what we have taught in the church here in the past we can see echoes of this story too. We can also gain insight into where we are going next.

Three dimensional fully rounded Christians exist in three relationships.

Up with God
In with one another, and
Out with the world around us

All bound together in LOVE

we LOVE our GOD
we LOVE our FAMILY
we LOVE our WORLD

And I believe LOVE is our super power here.

When you get to the end of the story in Nehemiah it's bittersweet. And its a warning possibly also. Yes they did re-establish the temple, yes the law was returned and yes the city was restored.

But the people's hearts had grown cold as ever. The sabbath was not kept, the temple not respected, the city not looked after and everywhere was disunity.

Paul reminds us in 1 Cor 13:

13 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

If I have strategy, and vision, and resources, and courses, and clever motivational slogans, and action points and agreed outcomes and websites and social media coverage and HAVE NOT LOVE.....I GAIN NOTHING.

We LOVE our God
We LOVE our family, and
WE LOVE our world

We can only loved because he first loved us.

How do we KNOW that he loved us?

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Over the next three weeks we will look more closely at the how of loving our God, our Family and our World and what this will involve for us as a church.

Our why is simply that we've answered Jesus' call to build in love, Simply put that is the vision. To build in love.

Perhaps the worship team could come back up now and get ready. I'll close in a few moments.

Our WHO is King Jesus

Colossians 3 reminds us....

.....Christ is all, and is in all.

12Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **13** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. **14** And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

The next three weeks will see the rest of the team put some flesh on the bones but.

The church we see is a community of worship
The church we see is a community of transformation
The church we see is a community of blessing to our world

The church we see is filled with People who live 3 dimensional lives
Up in and out

The church we see is filled with people who love their God, love their family and love their world

The church we see is ALIVE

It's time to run with this guys. It's time to build.