

## HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Bible Readings: 1 Thessalonians 1

Mark 1:1-13

Date: 20 September 2015

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Hope you have had a great summer.

Three part holiday this year ... after all the prep for Zoe's wedding last summer. We can't believe it's been their first anniversary and they have headed off to Italy!

Wonderful time in Scotland and the Lakes.

Amazing scenery and fantastic walks.

Mixed weather but never so bad that we couldn't get out.

The third part was a family long weekend at home – which was just great and on the Sunday just the five of us: an occasion which we figure will become much more of a rarity as time goes on.

First week back was 6 Sept, last week was Carnival when we were able to serve our friends in the community. Thank you so much to all those volunteered and helped on the day. The feedback has been great. And now today we get the autumn programme proper up and running.

Our series theme is Vision and Values, looking again at the things we stand by, live by and uphold day by day as members of this local church in our community, at home, at work, at school or at college.

We know the Vision Statement well enough, I hope:

*To live by faith, to be known by love, to be a voice of hope*

But although we may know it, we need to keep reminding ourselves of it, challenging each other with it, and making sure that it is still true for us and of us.

Vision is really important ... for many months we had the following on our monthly flier ...

*Vision without action is merely a dream.*

*Action without vision just passes the time.*

*Vision with action can change the world.*

Bill Hybels says that “the local church is the hope of the world”. New Wine says that we are “local churches changing nations”.

Vision statements and mission statements and straplines are everywhere these days ... but they are not just for churches.

Tesco's strapline: “Every little helps”.

Asda's strapline: “Asda price”.

These are simple statements which indicate what the company wants to be known for.

A little quiz ...

What or who do we think this one is?

- To refresh the world...
- To inspire moments of optimism and happiness...
- To create value and make a difference.

### **Coca Cola**

Or this one: To make people happy

### **Disney**

Or this: A just world without poverty

### **Oxfam**

Or this: To create a better every day life for the many people

### **Ikea**

Or this: To help people and businesses throughout the world realize their full potential

### **Microsoft**

One final thing from Bill Hybels before we get into the heart of the subject today ... Bill says that we must never forget that vision leaks. He talks about a vision bucket, into which we pour our prayed through, agonized over, carefully crafted, easily remembered statement. And it's easy to think that once we've put it in the bucket that's where it stays and everyone can recall it at a moment's notice.

His point about the leak is that people have other stuff going on in their lives, other than the pithy statement we have encouraged them to learn and study – they've got work, family, hobbies, travel ... all kinds of stuff which just clutters our brains and fills our minds.

Bill Hybels says that because vision leaks and we don't just remember it forever because we've been told it once, we need to repeat and go over and look again and again at a vision statement to make sure that we've got it and that we keep it at the forefront of our mind and thinking.

So from the heady world of billion dollar business to the life of the local church ...

*To live by faith, to be known by love, to be a voice of hope*

**We'll take a look at these phrases one by one ...**

***To live by faith ...***

Living by faith is an expression which characterises the way we are orientated and focussed. The first Christians, the people Paul was writing to, had lived one way once and were living a new way now. They knew and trusted that God was in their life; they knew and firmly believed that Jesus had lived and died for them; they experienced the power of the Holy Spirit at first hand at work in their hearts and minds.

So living by faith means being founded on, rooted in and living for the creator of the world.

Those who live by faith see the world differently from others who don't. It's not all about making as much money as you can. Loving God and loving neighbour means that the specs that we wear, the filters through which we see everything, are loving specs, "looking out for other people" specs, not self-seeking specs where we are the only ones that matter.

Those who live by faith will be generous with their time and with their money. They will want to make a difference in the short time they have on earth: in the relationships they invest in, the friends they make and the people they meet.

It has been a huge privilege to walk alongside Chris Reddick's family these past few weeks. We were so excited when Chris stepped into the role of Treasurer to help us when we really needed it. He brought a fresh vision and a clarity to areas of confusion and muddle. Chris was amazingly humble, but he was a very bright bloke and very sharp when it came to numbers. How devastated we have been knowing that his death was both unexpected, really shocking and extremely untimely.

However, at his funeral service – a service of thanksgiving and celebration of his life – person after person spoke of the impact Chris had had and, even in retirement continued to have, on their own lives and the lives of their families.

Chris lived by faith. He saw the world through a Jesus-shaped lens. He did all that he possibly could to enrich and enhance the lives of others because of his love for God and his believe in the goodness and potential of people.

How very different from the many other funerals we have attended when all we hear about are fancy holidays and playing golf.

Friends, there is no much more to life than this. What will people say about us when we're gone? If we truly are people of faith, is there evidence enough to convict us of it?

*To live by faith, **to be known by love***

There is a great amount of truth in the phrase: actions speak louder than words. That's not to say that we should never have anything to say about the faith we say we live by; but it is to say that doing things has an impact that mere words may not.

We say we're a really close family. But if we never hang out, go places together, do things together, share life in a meaningful way, keep in touch, look out for one another when the chips are down – it all counts for nothing very much.

So being known by love is an attitude thing – we are trying to be nice to people – but we are also trying to serve people and love them by our actions.

One or two people commented about my reaction to the results of the clip boards going round at the end of the service on 6 Sept. I didn't swear – but I was disappointed. Because it's no good or it's not good enough saying that we stand for all this "being known by love" stuff if we are not willing to put our name on a list for an hour if we possibly can to serve the community in which we live.

I know some people were away. Be away with my blessing. It's important for us to be away. We can't do everything.

I know that some people couldn't physically stand or lift or move about enough to do what was being asked of them. Of course, I get that. You can pray for us at home.

But for those who are able bodied, sound in wind and limb who simply choose not to get involved or play their part, or do their bit, are not allowing themselves to be known by love ... in action.

John the baptizer is a nutter. He is in the wilderness eating weird stuff. Wearing strange gear. Pointing people not to himself but to the one who was to come. And Jesus himself has a most odd start to his public ministry: he is baptized by his cousin in the river, he sees the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descend like a dove. And a voice sound from heaven with the amazing words – you are my son. The Spirit drives him out into the wilderness also to be tempted by Satan for 40 days.

There is something profoundly uncomfortable about this. Christian faith is costly not cosy. Following Jesus involved putting yourself on the line; putting your reputation out there for scrutiny, putting your friendships and family relationships at some risk ... but all done whether by John or by Jesus for love. To demonstrate God's love. To say not look at me so much as look at him.

John points to Jesus. Jesus points to the Father. We, when we are known by love, point to Father, the Son and the Spirit as the ones we know and love in the trinity. And

there are times when it's not comfortable to do that. There are times when we need to put ourselves out a bit.

Because our action is noticed. Our words may be ignored or disregarded. Our actions cannot be ignored or disregarded or dismissed.

Being known by love is a powerful way of demonstrating what we believe to be true and it so very often cannot be denied. It's impact can take us all by surprise.

We know they are Christians by their love.

Thank you so much to those who got with the programme and who on behalf of all of us, did your bit last weekend.

*To live by faith, to be known by love, **to be a voice of hope***

Jeremy Corbyn is a voice of hope ... to some. David Cameron ... to others. Tony Farron ... to others again. Political voices from the left and the right and the wilderness.

It was a great joy just a couple of years ago to be at the HTB leadership conference in London when the new Pope and the new Archbishop of Canterbury were so much in the news. The church (Roman and Anglican) was a voice of hope in a way it had not been for some considerable time.

For the church to be a voice of hope we do need to have something to say in the political arena, in the world of economics, in the discussion about health and about

education and about the poor and about the elderly and about the refugees, about the beginning and the end of life.

For the church to be taking a lead in the co-ordination of relief, in collecting things which will be useful to those who have lost everything and in offering accommodation (their own homes and in some cases beds) to those who have no place to rest is a wonderful example of what it means to be voice of hope.

For the church to be in the front line of those saying that the current situation is not the final situation, that the despair and anxiety and hopelessness that people feel is not all there is out there is amazing and thrilling and exciting.

Friends, this is where the rubber hits the road. Where all our fine talk and lofty ideals are tested out – are they are we for real or are we just full of hot air and platitudes?

I know these issues are complex. I know that all is not straightforward. But people in need are people in need. And those who can should consider carefully how we might respond, consider what we might say, consider what we might do, consider how we might help to bring change and transformation and hope into a world where all is seemingly lost.

The situation on the ground is changing rapidly, I know. But let's not be like Hungary and put up a wall, hoping that others (who may be much less able than we) that others will receive the homeless refugee and give them a better future because for us to do it would be too close to home, too discomfoting and dare I say it, too costly?

*HTS*

*Church and Community*

*To live by faith, to be known by love, to be a voice of hope*

If this is what's in our vision bucket and if this is what has been leaking a bit over the months, now is the time to get topped up with vision, to hear afresh the call of Jesus to us to follow him, and to make ourselves available to him on his terms not ours.

This week I visited Waitrose – not for shopping, but for my monthly coffee and chat with the staff in the upstairs dining room. For the first time I noticed that above the servery there is a quotation, a quotation from John Lewis himself and it says this, in flowing script:

“Our dining room ought to be managed that, when people leave the partnership, they regret it regularly, every meal time”.

Friends, might we say that we could be so living by faith, so known by love, so offering a voice of hope in our community and our village that our life together meant so much, felt so close and met our many needs, that there would be no leaving, only staying and enthusiastically and cheerfully getting on with the work God has called us to do.

Let's pray ...