

## St Georges Church Epsom

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How does God's big vision speak into our vision for St George's?

By Rev Mark McConnell

### John 1:1-18

I'm excited to be preaching today

-because I get to preach on this amazing section on in John Chpt 1

>and also get to talk about God's big vision

And I'm sure you all know how important vision is

-if we don't have vision we not only can't see where we are going

>we also can't see where we need to go

When churches talk about vision there is often a key verse that's quoted

Prov 29:18

Where there is no vision, the people perish

That is from the AV (or the KJV)

-what's interesting is that the NIV translates it quite different

>Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint

That's a bit different, isn't it

-but I kind of like it better, because

-what we need is not so much a vision

>we actually need revelation to speak into our reality

Eugene Peterson in the Message translates the same verse this way

>If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves

If we are NOT going to stumble over ourselves here at St George's

-we need to know **not so much** our vision

>we need to know what God is doing, what is God is up to

>we need to know God's big vision

In John 1:1-18 we come face to face with God's big vision

-because we come face to face with God's revelation

>and God's revelation is Jesus Christ

>the Word made flesh

If you want to know what God is up to

>then look at Jesus Christ

If you want to know God's big vision

>then look at Jesus Christ

And this is how John starts his gospel

So here are three big ideas to note about God's big vision in John1

### **First... God's Big Vision has to do with a new creation – making all things new**

John begins his Gospel with these incredible words

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all people.

And with these words right at the beginning of John's gospel  
-we are taken back to the very beginning of everything  
>to Gen 1

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. <sup>3</sup> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

The biblical narrative tells us that God speaks creation into being simply by his word  
-and then John tells us that this word through which God spoke creation into being  
>was actually Jesus Christ

And so right at the beginning John's gospel  
-we see an amazing link between creation and (what we call) redemption  
What God does in the one is not all that different from what God does in the other  
-in both creation and redemption God speaks into the chaos and into the darkness and creates  
>brings light  
>and brings life

But this time the context is different  
-this time the context is the chaos and darkness of fallen human existence  
-and a creation which is suffering the consequences  
It is into this new context that God speaks his creative word of Jesus Christ

What is God's big vision?  
-God's big vision is not simply to save some souls (so that they can float off to heaven)  
-God's big vision is not simply a bunch more Christians on planet earth  
-God's big vision in Jesus Christ is new creation

Paul in Col 1 talks about this new creation in terms of the reconciliation of all things

And what's really interesting is he talks first of all about Jesus and his role in the first creation  
-and then goes on to talk about the role of Jesus in the new creation

So the first creation...  
<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And then the new creation...  
<sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Everything that was torn apart because of the Fall  
-is now being made new again  
>the reconciliation of ALL things, ALL things on earth, and ALL things in heaven

And then we have these words of Jesus right at the end of the book of revelation  
-in Rev 21:5  
-after John sees an amazing vision of a new heaven and new earth  
>the one who was seated on the throne said  
>I am making everything new!

THE PASSION?

What is the big thing that God is up to in speaking his word Jesus Christ?

-the big thing is the renewal of all things

>the big thing is new creation

And it is in the context of this big vision that we should see and understand the church

-the church is where the world is to see something of what this new creation looks like

>the church is God's new community

>God's new humanity

This is what Paul says in Eph 2:15

-in talking about bringing Jew and Gentile together

>God's purpose was to create in himself one new humanity

-it is in and through the church that the world sees the reconciliation

>that has been achieved in Christ's death and resurrection

The church, especially in our relationships with one another

> is called to participate in this big thing that God is up to

And so we see that mission is not something that starts with us

-mission is actually something that starts with God

-the God, who through his Word Jesus Christ, is committed to new creation

>to the reconciliation of all things

BUT... here is the thing...

-how does God's Word, Jesus Christ, achieve this new creation?

**Well... here we come to the second big idea**

**-God's big vision is achieved by the Word, through whom all things were made, becoming flesh**

The Word of God,

>takes on flesh and enters into creation

In the first creation this Word speaks creation into existence

-in this act of new creation, this Word now enters into that same creation

>a creation which is now broken

>a creation which is now experiencing alienation

>a creation which is now groaning

-the Word, Jesus Christ, enters into our world

>he enters into the darkness of human existence (as John says)

>so that humanity and all creation might be won back to God

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us

I love the way that Eugene Peterson in *The Message* translates John 1:14:

*The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.*

THIS says John, the Word becoming flesh, IS the glory of God

-in the incarnation we don't simply come in contact with some information about God

>or a mediator who points us to God

>or a miracle that shows us some aspect of God

No... here in the incarnation, we come face to face with God himself

We can think of the glory of God as everything makes God God

-and where do we see everything that makes God God?

-it is here in the Word becoming flesh

>because here we see the God who is love  
>doing only what the God who is love can do

No other God than the God who is love could do this  
-no other religion has this kind of God  
>this IS the glory of our God  
-here we are confronted by the God who will not forsake his wayward creation  
>but instead is determined to redeem that creation at any cost

So... we can say that God's way of achieving his big vision  
-is not to stand back and issue a command  
-it is not to come with a mighty army of angels  
-it is not to come with a word of judgement and condemnation  
Rather, God's way of achieving his BIG vision  
>is through weakness, vulnerability and risk  
It is by God himself to enter in to our reality  
>experiencing our existence  
>moving into our neighbourhood

This is God's way  
-and because it is God's way, it is therefore also our way  
>if we are the people of God

**This leads to the third BIG idea about God's big vision**  
**-and it is this**  
**-God's big vision includes the church participating in the mission of the Son**  
**>and this participation means following Jesus in incarnation**

This isn't clear in John chpt 1  
-but it is clear from some verses later on John

In Jesus upper room prayer in John 17  
>on the evening that Jesus is arrested just before his death  
-he prays these words to the Father  
>As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world (John 17:18)

As you have sent me  
-as we have already noted mission begins with God  
-mission is God's mission before it is our mission  
-and then from the heart of God, there proceeds another mission  
>the mission of the church

As you have sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world  
-in other words  
>I am sending them (Jesus says) in the same kind of way that you sent me

This prayer is really a prayer of anticipation  
-the real sending takes place after the resurrection (after easter)

In John 20 we read these words...

<sup>19</sup>On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! **As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.**"

Just as the word became flesh and dwelt among us

- so we too, as the followers of Jesus are called to enter into the world for the sake of the world
- and as we enter into the world we are called to en flesh the gospel in bodily form
- we are called to incarnate the gospel in all areas of life

People should be able to look at the church and, as it were  
>see, feel, hear, touch, even taste the gospel in a very sensory way  
>just as if Jesus were still continuing his mission in the world

This is who we are as the church  
-we are those who are sent, just as the Father sent the Son  
-to be the church means participating in God's big vision  
-to the extent that we fail in this, is the extent that we fail in being the church

The Church is by nature missionary to the extent that, if it ceases to be missionary, it has not just failed in one of its tasks, it has ceased being Church. (Andrew Kirk)

As the father has sent me, so I am sending you

And so here is a big question for us  
-what would it look like for St George's to incarnate the gospel here Auckland  
-what would look like for us as the people of God here in Epsom to give the gospel flesh and bones

We are called to incarnational mission  
-and we do this just like Jesus did it  
How?  
-not by standing back at a distance

We do this by fully entering in to human existence, human culture, human relationships  
>by fully engaging in our communities and neighbourhoods  
-by leaving our place of security and entering into what is unknown  
-by crossing boundaries and chasms for the sake of the other  
-by living in the reality of God's new creation where all the stuff of life actually matters  
>fully engaged and fully present to the other  
>and in the midst of this present creation

And this of course is a deeply relational model of engagement  
-this is not about merely giving good information  
>this is actually about the giving of ourselves  
>in weakness, vulnerability and with a sense of risk

Tim Dearborn

"It is insufficient to proclaim that the church of God has a mission in the world. Rather, the God of mission has a church in the world. (REPEAT)