

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups April 19th 2009
More love...More Power! Renewing our Vision – the journey so far!
Ephesians 1:1-14



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Over the past six months many of us at St Paul's will have been aware that God has been taking us on a journey as we have reviewing and renewing our vision and its out workings. Back in December of last year I (Paul) took time out to think, pray, read and write up some of what I believe God has been saying to our church, and just before Christmas I began to take time to share what was on my heart with our church leaders -PCC, Small Group Leaders and others. Do please read the whole of the vision document 'Renewing our Vision' in our summer termly booklet which formed the basis of sharing with leaders. There has since been some really encouraging responses and consequently this term I would like to take the opportunity to share with every church member more of what I believe God has in store for St Paul's!

One of the key truths for us to engage with, that came out of the time that our PCC spent sharing praying and listening to God, was that though that God has given our church a precious gift of love for one another we lack power! So the theme for our preaching and teaching this summer term is - **'More Love More Power!'** A timely theme as we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit and empowering of the first church at Pentecost! Over the next three months, with the help of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we will be exploring together a new vision of what our Church could look like and the part that each of us can play when we rely on the Spirit's empowering! So over the course of this next term there will be opportunities for each of us to respond to what the Spirit is saying and to grow in faith, love and power!

The beginning of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus is wonderfully encouraging. Listen to the litany of affirmation in the first 14 verses: *grace and peace, blessed, chosen, freely given, forgiven, riches, grace, wisdom, good pleasure, hope, included, truth, praise.* Paul writes to encourage this small group of Christians living in a city of 250,000 and his introduction affirms three important truths for them and for the church in any age.

Firstly, God has chosen each one. Read v 3-4a. For discussion on the election of believers it is natural to turn to Calvin who, beginning on the 1st May 1548, preached over 48 consecutive sermons on Ephesians at St Peter's in Geneva! He commented *"Although we cannot conceive either by argument or reason how God has elected us before the creation of the world, yet we know it by his declaring it to us; and experience itself vouches for it sufficiently, when we are enlightened in the faith."* We may say we choose God, and, yes, we do have freedom of choice, but the reality is that the initiative is always with God, we are invited to respond to his choosing of us.

Secondly, God has a plan and purpose for the world in which his church has an integral part to play – read v11. It is a plan that is to do with the manifestation of his glory – read v6, 12,14. Glory is not a word that we commonly use today. Chambers defines it as referring to an object of supreme pride, splendor, beauty, attainment and achievement. The glory of God is the revelation of himself, his love, his grace, his Son. We are called to live to the praise of his glory of grace, to worship him, to live lives that would cause others to respond to him and to worship him as well.

Thirdly, God promises that his Spirit will be active, alive and at work in and through his people. Read v13b – 14. The Holy Spirit is a deposit or guarantee that God will be at work in power in the world through his church, through ordinary people like you and me.

So there is some Good News, some wonderful news in this introduction to Ephesians. God has chosen us; God's plans for the world have us at the heart; and God's power will be at work in and through us.

Robert Warren helpfully suggests there are 5 step changes a church needs to make if it is to renew its life and vision: Stop – pray; Look – around at the needs of your community; Listen: to one another and to God; Plan; Change! Regarding the planning and changing most over estimate what can be done in a year and underestimate what can be done in 5! As a result of our vision initiative some green shoots are already beginning to sprout! Look out for the Early Bird and Baby Café; other vision initiatives are ready and waiting in the wings including new initiatives for supporting those at work — look out for 'Work Out;' new ways of praying for one another - look out for 'Prayer Pals;' new opportunities to listen to God—look out for 'Time Out;' and new ways of worshipping together—look out for 'Café Church' on June 7th!

If Paul was writing to us here at St Paul's I wonder if he might express the three key truths in his introduction along these lines: "... you are in my team, I've chosen you! My plans and purposes for the world beginning here in Dorking are glorious and ...they begin with you ...don't be worried...you don't have to do it all by yourself for I will empower you with my very breath...my life...my Spirit...I promise!



Witness: choose from these questions to discuss

1. How are you affected by the fact that God had a plan for you before the world was created?
2. What do you think it means to be chosen by God? What is your reaction to the notion of being chosen and predestined?
3. What is God's ultimate plan and purpose for the future? See verse 10
4. What does it mean to live "to the praise and glory of God?" How does your life need to change so that you are living to the praise of God's glory? How can you influence your Christian community – our church, to live for God's glory/
5. How does being part of a Christian community help you to see God at work?
6. How does this passage increase your sense of participation in God's total plan ...for Dorking... for your world...for the universe?
7. On a piece of paper complete the following statement. I feel God's will is (a) a ball and chain around my neck, (b) a goal to reach, (c) reassuring, (d) unknowable, (e) something to rejoice in, (f) something to fear, (g) something to discover and then do, or (h) other: Write a brief explanation for your answer, Now fold up the papers and have each person choose one. Read each response and try to guess who wrote it. Talk about why you think that response belongs to each person.
8. Share ways in which you have seen God reveal his will and plan over the course of your life. Do you see any patterns? Thank God for his guidance.