

HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Readings: Amos 9:17 to end
John 2:1-11

Date: Sunday 17 January 2016
Ascot Churches Pulpit Swap!

- Happy New Year!
- Not sure quite when you stop saying those words?!
- Greetings from HTS

Today is the Ascot Churches Pulpit Swap.
Start of the New Year.
Just before the start of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

New Year, of course, is a time for resolutions, promises, good intentions and plans for the coming year – many of which last at least a couple of weeks!

I have been encouraging people at HTS to make at three key new year resolutions:

bible reading
prayer and
attendance at weekly worship

Three key resolutions for 2016 whether we are larks, owls or just coming to by lunchtime!! See the HTS website for what I had to say about morning noon and night!

This morning and for this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, I want to speak for a few minutes about vision. A vision for unity.

At HTS, we have a simple vision statement: to live by faith, to be known by love, to be a voice of hope. The Churches Together movement has one too: a visible sign .. deepening communion .. sharing the Gospel together .. making connections.

This morning I want to take a step back and look at what lies behind those important and inspiring words, using the backdrop of John chapter 2.

Vision, of course, is about having a glimpse into the future. It's about recognising where we have come from, where we currently are and on the basis of both of those things, casting an eye as to where we want to be in the days, weeks, months and years to come.

This morning I want only to look a little way ahead although I am conscious of some churches which are keying into 2020 and beyond! It all sounds a bit Toy Story to me. As a bear of little brain, I can only cope with the next one or two steps at a time.

An example of this past, present and future thinking was brought to my attention this week ... you may know that as far back as 2013 we all became aware (I may have tried my best to make people aware ... week after week) that in 2017, the city of Hull would be the UK City of Culture.

Growing up there I saw the after-effects of the wartime bombs on the city centre. Many streets had places where there were just gaps in the buildings – whole department stores and offices had taken a massive hit. And because of lack of investment, the ruin had remained and piles of bricks were still there for all to see. I promise I am not exaggerating – this is what it was like in parts of the town centre when I was growing up there in the 60s!

Over time, money and investment came and the city found a new hope, the possibilities of a new future. The docks were redeveloped, the city centre transformed and Hull City and Hull Rugby Football Club (Hull FC) found a fantastic new home in the KC Stadium. All very promising and then the thought that Hull would be the city of culture

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This week it has been announced that Hull is in the list of the Top 10 cities in the world to be visited this year. It's number 8. Alongside Reykjavik, Vancouver and others. I am slightly concerned that the list is put together by the Rough Guide people ... ! But hey! We still have the past, present and future set before us and using the example of a great northern city, we have a vision of what might yet be.

I know ... you are wondering where all this is going ... I said I wanted to take a step back at look what lies behind and before the Churches Together vision statement words ... and in doing that, we are going to take a fresh look at who Jesus is, who is it exactly that we say we worship, relate to, seek to serve and want to tell other people about.

The Churches Together Vision talks about ...

a visible sign ..
deepening communion ..
sharing the Gospel together ..
making connections

The action of course takes place at a wedding ... a very familiar kind of setting for many of us. Whatever our own personal circumstances, I guess we would all agree that marriage relationships are key to society. They form the basis of stable family life and provide coherence and meaning to living together, maybe bringing up children together and growing old together. You may even have visited Cana in Galilee where all this took place.

Couples, of course, meet in all kinds of different places. Some meet at work; some in a bar; some at university; some first meet on the internet. It's amazing what good deals you can find these days on e-bay or on freecycle!

And couples also have lots of advice coming from all quarters ... So, where to find advice about marriage? I thought you might appreciate some advice from young people that I came across recently:

First, to the question '*How do you decide who to marry?*' Alan aged 10 offers this advice -

*You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff.
Like, if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dips coming.*

Or Kristen also aged 10 suggests that -

'No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry. God decides it all way before, and you get to find out later who you're stuck with.'

To the question *'How can a stranger tell if two people are married?'* Derrick aged 8 says -

'You might have to guess, based on whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids.'

'Is it better to be single or married?'

Anita aged 9 thinks:

'It's better for girls to be single but not for boys. Boys need someone to clean up after them.'

And perhaps the most significant question of all:

'How would you make a marriage work?' Ricky aged 10 says:

'Tell your wife that she looks pretty, even if she looks like a truck.'

My prayer is that marriage is always celebrated well and that we rightly get together to party. God is pleased when two people come together and for family and friends it is a real event ... as long as the wine doesn't run out!

And it is this nightmare thought that bring us to our bible reading today. John tells us that Jesus was a guest at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. He was there with his mum and his mates. We can imagine that all had gone really well. The formalities done, the speeches were over and they are just hanging around, having a fag outside, waiting

for the disco to start and the younger friends to arrive when the cry goes up – well it wasn't a cry, of course, it was Mary speaking quietly into Jesus' ear (as I imagine it) "They have no wine".

Now, here you get to see a little bit of what I would be like if I were Jesus and this happened to me. I would say – "That is a real shame but it is not my problem. I am not the host here. I didn't do the numbers. I didn't let these people get to drink themselves silly. I thought we'd agreed it was two glasses each. I know it's a bit sad, but don't lay it on me".

Now, of course, I am not Jesus and he would certainly have responded with more generosity and compassion at the family's predicament ... or would he?

Interestingly, Jesus says this: "What concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

In other words he seems to be saying "That's not my problem", which is surprising when he is supposed to be the saviour of the world and can fix stuff like healing people, delivering people from demons and making blind people see. He can also do cool stuff like walking on water, feeding 5000 people and turning water into wine. As we are about to see.

So, having been initially reluctant Jesus steps up and does his stuff. He tells the servants to fill the water jars. They do this and then draw some off. They take it to the chief

steward who finds that the water has become wine. Not only wine now, but the best wine.

This is a big miracle – 20 or 30 gallons of water become wine is a lot of liquid. If this were fuel – we are talking 528 litres which at current pump prices (£1.03 in Ascot High Street) is £543.84. Which in those days would have been an awful lot of money. Not that the petrol would have been any use to them because they didn't have cars. But 30 gallons of wine was a lot of liquid, and worth an awful lot of money.

Now we may say this is all very well. This is exactly the kind of street magic we see showcased on the telly on Saturday evenings from time to time when Strictly's not on. Unsuspecting members of the public are amazed with wonder and illusion. Miracle, of course, is not that kind of magic. The water not only looked like wine – it was wine, the best wine, served last.

And John tells us what this deal is all about.

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him.

This is what is going on here – Jesus is making it really clear exactly who he is. And as he does so, people, ordinary people like you and me decide to follow him.

Let's just think about that for a moment – if those early disciples had thought that Jesus was just an interesting character, or that he just had some fun stories to tell, or

that he could just do magic tricks ... and that was all, we would not be here, this building wouldn't be here, this country's landscape would not be littered with the spires and towers of Christian churches, I wouldn't have a job, Darrell and Patrick wouldn't have a job, none of us would have anywhere to live. It would all be a bit of a sorry do.

The fact though that they saw this and other miracles, experienced and responded to Jesus explains why we are here and why we are doing what we are doing.

This is all to say that Jesus is in the change business. Jesus changes things. Jesus can change water into wine. He can change our focus on material things into a focus on eternal things. Jesus can change our total obsession with ourselves into a passionate concern for others. Jesus can change a heart bent on destruction, violence and wickedness into one of peace, mercy and love.

And that's where the vision thing fits in ... churches working together can be a **visible sign** .. when relationships are strong and it looks like we get on well and support and encourage each other, this is a visible sign to the world that there might be something in the Jesus stuff.

And that's where the vision thing fits in ... churches working together can experience **deepening communion** .. not just the sharing of life like we do in the office; nor even like we do with our family, but real, deep sharing of love for one another and for the world in which we live. Communion with God and his created order: taking the initiative, taking

responsibility, taking time to develop and to grow these things.

And that's where the vision thing fits in ... churches working together can find themselves **sharing the Gospel together** .. only this week at our monthly Chapter meeting we were hearing about the possibilities of imagining a Church Holiday Club across the area – maybe even have one in Bracknell and one in Ascot. Why not check out The Lighthouse Project – you can see what they are up to online? An amazing way of sharing the Gospel together with children and families, many of whom have nothing to do with church yet at all. The stories from the Lighthouses around the country are truly inspiring and very exciting. Before you get into a complete panic, we are not talking about this summer ... maybe summer 2017?

And finally, that's where the vision thing fits in ... churches working together can be **communities which make connections**. Sometimes the church is the only community which unites the fragmented groups in local society. Sometimes the church proves itself a catalyst for new thinking about neighbourhoods and community needs. Sometimes the church is able, where others are not, put broken people together with help and healing, put those who have together with those who need, and put those who can and will with those can't or won't.

Whatever your politics, it is simply true to say that the Christian church in this country makes a huge difference behind the scenes, often in a very quiet and unassuming kind of a way. Volunteer hours and human contact and

relationship in that sense have no price, save to say that without them the whole country would be the poorer and in certain places full of despair and fearfulness.

So this is what is going on here – Jesus is making it really clear exactly who he is. And as he does so, people, ordinary people like you and me decide to follow him. Jesus is in the change business. His church is a huge change agent in our community, our country and the wider world.

Being part of something like this, being a member of a church or of churches working together in unity for the honour of God's name and his greater glory is a high vision and a high calling. It is my pleasure and privilege simply today to remind us of it and to encourage us to get on board. Amen.