

Howrah Sandford Weekly Church Bulletin

Sunday 28th June 2020

SUNDAY SERVICES at St Thomas's Howrah 8.30 and 10 am (both Holy Communion) and St Barnabas's South Arm 10 am (Morning Prayer). All services followed by morning tea, without food.

COVID-SAFE PROCEDURES: hand sanitising, social distancing, recording of attendees, individual cups for communion, no congregational singing yet, books replaced by handouts or projector, online worship option for those who prefer to stay home (go to stthomashowrah.com and click on "Join worship online")

THEME: Our parish vision is "to become a growing Christian community of all ages, reflecting the diversity of our local community and living out God's Word in our daily lives"

SENTENCE OF SCRIPTURE: the master said to the servant, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled."

BIBLE READINGS:

- Galatians 3: 26-28
- Psalm 67
- Luke 14: 16-23

SERMON:

The word "visionary" may conjure up the picture of someone who is passionate about a far-fetched idea like having taxi drones ferrying passengers around the skies over Hobart or running guided tours of the moon. They are big V visionaries. But we're all visionaries in at least a small v sense. Whenever we go somewhere new for a holiday, or try cooking a new recipe or plant something in the garden we will be imagining how it will turn out. Most good things that we achieve start with a vision where we exercise our imaginations.

However it's essential that a vision lines up with God's values or it will eventually crash and burn. For instance Adolf Hitler's vision to found the Third Reich, an Empire that would last a thousand years, based on racism and violence, ended after only ten years in an horrific war that brought enormous death and destruction across Europe and beyond. On the other hand William Wilberforce's vision to end the slave trade, on the basis of the God-given dignity of all people brought blessing to countless millions.

Our parish has adopted a vision "to become a growing Christian community of all ages, reflecting the diversity of our local community and living out God's Word in our daily lives". It is based on the teachings of Jesus that God welcomes everybody into his family regardless of race, age, gender, education, marital status, political leanings or income. Luke 14: 16-23 is part of a story about a wealthy man who invited his privileged friends to a lavish party. When the party was about to begin he sent out his servant to remind the guests who all rebuffed him with a variety of excuses about why they were too tied up to come. Instead of cancelling the party the disgruntled host sent his servants out into the streets to invite "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame", people who would never expect to be invited to a rich man's party. But there were still empty seats so the servant was ordered to "go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in so that my house will be full." This parable was Jesus' way of describing his own ministry and mission, where he came to his own people and suffered rejection while getting a better reception from social outcasts, Samaritans and even Gentiles. Later his apostles had the same experience. They eventually came to the conclusion that Old Testament thinking was outmoded. There were no longer two types of people: God's Chosen People and then all the rest. In Galatians chapter three Paul explained that Jesus had broken down the barriers we put up between people, "in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." The vocation of the Christian Church is to be a spacious house that seeks out, welcomes and nurtures the whole range of people in the community including migrants and overseas workers, people with mental illness and physical disability, those with poor literacy skills, the long-term unemployed.

A snapshot of our three Sunday congregations shows a gathering of grandparents and great grandparents of English-speaking background with a Christian experience going all the way back to Sunday School. Of course there are exceptions but let's be honest –they are exceptions. At this rate we're going we'll fade out in the next ten years.

There's two ways to respond to this:

The first is to ease our discomfort by finding excuses like "People are aren't interested in God anymore", "Other churches are working with the younger generations", "We've tried everything and it hasn't worked". But be warned - excuses are not looked upon favourably by God, going right back to Adam's and Eve's lame excuses for eating the fruit right through to Jesus' parable of the talents where the lazy servant excused himself for burying the money he was entrusted with instead of investing it.

The second and better way to respond to our predicament as a parish is to embrace a vision for what we believe God wants our parish to become. But be warned - we can so easily quench the vision by fruitless fretting that we do not have the resources: the people, the plans or the money to bring the vision to reality. Trust God - something mysterious and wonderful happens when we embrace a vision in line with God's all-inclusive love for the whole diversity of people in our community and when we pray about it. Bear in mind what Jesus said about not succumbing to worry but seeking first the Kingdom of God and trusting that God will give us the tools we need for the task.

THE TAKE AWAY: think about our Vision and Mission

- 1. Fill in the blanks:** (if you get stuck check our home page: <https://www.stthomashowrah.com/>)

Our PARISH VISION is "to become a _____ Christian community of all ages, reflecting the _____ of our local community and _____ God's Word in our daily lives."

Our PARISH MISSION is to

- i. Love ____ and his _____
- ii. _____ to be more like _____
- iii. Share the _____ of Jesus's _____

- 2. Deal with excuses:** write down on a piece of paper your excuses for why our church is failing to effectively reach the younger generations (anyone under 60). Next step: set fire to it, eat it or flush it!

FOR YOUR PRAYERS:

- Families and individuals under pressure due to unemployment and other consequences of the covid restrictions.
- Anglicare, Show Hope, Mission Australia and other ministries responding to such needs.
- Parish Council Task Forces led by Lesley S, June W and Neil B.
- Our missionary, Kate, in South Asia.
- For the appointment of a new Rector for our parish

FROM THE MINISTER:

Hasn't the rain been wonderful! It's also been a blessing to see people returning to public worship. Holy Communion with individual glasses brought down to the congregation in the pews worked well, as did morning tea with disposable cups and no food. It was great to have music, although it's hard not to sing. But please only come back when you feel at ease about it. In the meantime the bulletins and online services will continue.

Sanitary pads for the university ministry to unemployed international students are being collected at church.

With the love of Jesus

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