

2nd week of our series on vision. Last week: began our series by looking at the value of vision. If you were here, you'll remember that we talked about the fact that at some level we all have vision, it is one of life's fundamentals. It's not a question of *whether* you have vision: but rather *what* vision you have. We have to ask ourselves: where are we looking? We reminded ourselves that vision:

- **Opens our eyes** – we start seeing things, perhaps for the first time
- **Lifts our horizons** – we 'lift our eyes to the hills', to what *could* be, to the bigger picture of what God is up to
- **Invites our commitment** – not just words – any vision worth its salt must translate into action, or it's just hot air, rising into the sky.

Here in Walton Churches Partnership, our vision is this:

Seeking, sharing and celebrating the abundant life of God

This is the vision which we believe opens our eyes, lifts our horizons and invites our commitment. We want to be excited by it, energised, and united. Today, we'll start to unpack that vision in detail by looking at the key phrase: what is the abundant life of God?

The phrase 'Abundant Life' is derived from famous verse in John 10:10 (from reading: READ. Greek has 2 words for life: first is *bios* = physical life (where words like biology come from). Not word used here: other word: *zoe* – true, eternal, spiritual life. 'Essence of life'. Ultimately, life given by God. Jesus want us to have this kind of life, *zoe* life.

But what is that? To get to heart of answer, need to begin at the very beginning, that's a very good place to start, as Maria von Trapp quite sensibly reminded us. ([No apologies for using 2 paragraphs that shared at Midnight communion a few weeks ago.](#)) 'In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth.' You'll recognise those as the first words of the bible. God there is plural – why? Nobody knew at the time. But St John worked it out: God is love. How does God love before he has a creation to love? It means God must have relationship within himself: Father, Son and Spirit in an eternal mutual relationship of love. It's beautiful when you think about it.

In the beginning, love: God in relationship with himself. Creation was made in love, for others to share it with him. Us. Humans – formed from the dust of the earth, yet carrying the image of God. So we too have that special capacity for relationship.

This capacity for relationship manifests itself in the most surprising ways. Rewind to Christmas a few weeks ago: when Uncle John got his annual Old Spice deodorant and talcum powder set, a gift given in love at no benefit to yourself: you bore the image of God. When you laughed at Gran's unfunny cracker jokes, you bore the image of God. When your difficult relative was rude about the food and it really hurt, you bore the image of God too – why? Because you were made to relate, and so you hurt when relationships are fractured.

Zoe life, the life of God, is all about right relationships. Abundant life, therefore, is about having **right relationships in every dimension – with God, with oneself, with each other and with the world.** This is what Jesus does – he restores these relationships on every level – this is what abundant life is:

Because of Jesus, we can have **a right relationship with God.** This is, of course, the heart of the gospel. The perfect start God gave Adam and Eve only got as far as Genesis 3 and the apple in the garden. We chose our own way, we chose to be our own gods, we abandoned the right relationship with God which he desired. And we can only get that back through Jesus. What we call our sin – shorthand for our naturally selfish inclinations – gets in the way. In Jesus, God becomes man, lives a perfect life and takes our sin on himself when he dies on the cross (BOOK ILLUSTRATION).

Why do Christians bang on about Jesus so much? – because he opens the way to life, life with God forever. He restores the relationship we need most of all – with God. And our response is what we were made to do: **PRAISE.** We can worship God and enjoy him forever. That's why praise is always at the heart of every Christian meeting, why we sing, why we give thanks in prayer. This is the first and fundamental relationship restored.

But it doesn't stop there, does it? Sometimes when Christians describe the good news, it ends there. Jesus saves us from our sins, pray a prayer and get over the line. But that is just the start. God's vision is for us to enjoy abundant life, restored relationships in every dimension. And so once he's set the foundational one right – with him – he can get to work on the rest. And as an aside, we do need that one getting right. So often humans try to fix the others without fixing this one. It doesn't work – take the spark plug out of a car and you could have the best engineered engine in the world but the car won't run. We must get right with God or the rest never quite falls into place.

But with that one in place, God can start restoring all our other relationships. 2nd dimension: **our relationship with oneself.** Grace leads to **PEACE.** Start of every NT letter – grace and peace, grace and peace. Peace with God, and with others, but also with ourselves. So many people carry around wounded images of themselves. God longs to heal that in us. To bring us to a place of peace, that deep sense of knowing that we are loved, we are special. If that is something a person hasn't experienced in their human relationships, God assures us of his constant faithful love. We must allow God to love us, and to allow his love to shout louder than all the other voices which might drown him out. Abundant life is a life of praise but also of peace.

The next set of relationships which God transforms is with each other. God longs for us to start relating in love just like he does. To help us do that, he gives us his **PRESENCE.** Yes, we know that in our own individual lives – but most of the NT refs to the presence of the Holy Spirit are addressed to people *plural* – i.e. to the community of God. The abundant life of Jesus given by the Holy Spirit manifests itself in communities like this. We carry the presence of God. We are being built into a place of worship where God lives by His Spirit – to paraphrase Ephesians 2.

Churches are the places which more than any other should have relationships which reflect the abundant life of God, as his presence transforms our relationships with each other. We love as Jesus loves, we bless as Jesus blesses, we serve as Jesus serves. His life radiates in communities which love him.

And that life spills out to the rest of the world too. The abundant life of Jesus brings **PURPOSE** to our wider relationships. We carry the good news of the kingdom everywhere. We have a message of justice, of care for creation, of the value of all people – we have a vision that gets us up in the morning and is with us when we go to bed at night. If you ask many Christians what they experience with Jesus in their lives, many will use this word, won't they: purpose. We become people of purpose. When we pray 'your kingdom come,' we also pray: 'your will be done, on earth as in heaven.' That's Jesus manifesto for the world, that earth would increasingly resemble heaven, as the abundant life of God is done here too.

One final 'p' – all this is great, but we need help. We can't fashion this stuff out of our own willpower. We need **POWER** – but not power of human desire, or government or physical force. We need power of God. The God who gives us his life, also gives us his power for this life to become a reality in us. His presence dwells in us: the Spirit of Jesus empowers us, he is God's downpayment on our lives.

'I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance.' **A life of praise/peace/presence/purpose/power. That is abundant life.**

When lay it out, always makes me think: *who wouldn't want that kind of life?*

Opportunity to receive that kind of life this morning – invitation to commitment.

Is 55: 'Come' – READ v1 – God who tell us to go first says 'Come' – come and receive this abundant life, all that I have for you. My presence, my peace, purpose, my power.

For many, invitation to choose to live in this life again, perhaps with a renewed focus on a particular element.

For some, maybe invitation to receive this kind of life for first time – INTRO PRAYER, ECHO WORDS IN YOUR HEART

PRAY

If made that prayer for first time, ask you to do 2 simple things: (1) tell someone; (2) take a booklet on table at back – abundant life started for you, prayer just the start.

Empowered by God, may we become people committed to seeking, sharing and celebrating the abundant life of God. Amen.

RESPONSE HYMN: Just as I am – O lamb of God I come, I come.