

VISION SUNDAY

These two great commands are what we have up on our church banner as our mission statement. Love God, love others. Luke 10:27

We are to love God in response to what God has done for us. The Father God sent Jesus because he so loved us and this world and Jesus died on the cross so that we might be bought back into relationship. We have been given the Holy Spirit who lives in us, and will never leave us. We are to love God in response to his incredible mercy and grace poured out on us. The command to love God is not one of grudging "I suppose I have to cos that's the rules." It is a response to God's love. Equally the command to love others is because of the amazing love we have been shown.

Traditionally many churches have often focussed on the Love God bit. We come together to sing songs of worship and praise. We study the Word of God. We run courses on different things. We have prayer meetings, retreat, and encourage people in their relationship with God. We are good at helping people to love God.

Sometimes we have not been so good at loving others. We have struggled to love those who are different and we have struggled to love our cities. We have struggled to love our neighbour both in the church and in the community. However, love God, love others is a great summary of what it means to follow Jesus.

However, we also have five areas that we give special priority too. Five areas that 3 years ago we discerned as a church and leadership that we felt deserved extra focus.

Develop authentic faith.

Authentic faith is a faith that is real. It does not brush over the fact that we have doubts. It does not claim that that we continually live in victory and that everyone will be healed. It is a faith that recognizes struggle and pain and grief. It is the kind of faith that cries out. God have mercy on me a sinner. Luke 18:13. It is the kind of faith that says, as Paul did "The things I don't want to do I do, and things I want to do, I don't" Romans 7:15. It is the kind of faith that values honesty above pretence: as James says God loves the humble. James 4:6-10

Authentic faith is a faith that goes beyond Sunday morning for 90 minutes. It is a faith that grapples with

how to love God and love others in equal measure. It is a faith that says as James does that faith without action is no faith at all. James. Authentic faith is about serving, using our gifts, and putting into practise the words of Jesus

Build Great Community

One of the features of the early church was their sense of community. Acts 2:42-47. They were meeting in each other's homes, were sharing possession and helping each other practically, and had real unity.

The No 1 longing in people's hearts today is to find a place to belong and be accepted. Study after study show the loneliness is a huge and growing issue. We are busier than ever, more connected via social media than ever, yet more isolated than ever. Building great community is about saying. "I will journey with this group of people, warts and all." (This is what church partnership is about). It is the exact opposite of consumer Christianity.

Be Intentionally Inter-generational.

We can pride ourselves on having 100 young people that we connect with week in week out. But the stats are very scary. 60% will not retain their faith or connection with a church. Research says the more we can connect our children to the wider church community, the less likely that is to happen.

Bronwyn and Jeremy are both running faith at home seminars this year to try to equip parents for their vital role as faith nurturers. This is why we have all age services once a term and why we include our children in baptism, prayer, communion, and other key things in the life of the church. Help them feel connected to the wider body.

If we don't have children, but know a family in the church, take an interest in the children. Make a habit of welcoming them to church. When we do community projects we make sure young people take part. Jesus said if we hinder a young person from coming to faith, it would be better we were dropped in a lake with a rock around our neck. . Matthew 8:5-6. That is how seriously Jesus saw this issue.

Develop Missional Capacity

Most of us have heard of the great commission. Matthew 28:18-20. But we don't like it. We don't



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want to talk to people about Jesus. We don't know what to say. It is embarrassing trying to defend the church and Israel Falou. If I say what I think about issues, I will be shot down and labelled as a narrow-minded homophobic bigot. Therefore, I just keep my faith to myself.

We recognize we live in challenging times in NZ. Christianity is no longer in the majority. We are now a minority, and NZ is no longer open as of right for churches to operate in the public space.

However, that does not mean we can run away from this, and develop a bunker mentality. I.e. The world is bad, and out to get us and corrupt us, and so we hide behind our church walls and wait for Jesus to return and fix everything. The Lord's Prayer makes clear that is not an option. Matthew 6:9-13

We are to pray for God's rule on earth. We are to work towards the kingdom. In addition, God wants to rule over every person, every business, every home, and every sports club. So for the last 3 years, we have been teaching on how we can talk about Jesus in a non-threatening way to a community that does not believe in religious truth. We have been running Alpha courses to introduce people to faith. We are teaching our children and young people how to share their faith

Serve the City

When we truly grasp the breadth of God's plan. To reconcile everything to himself, it is truly breath taking. Ephesians 1:10

God has placed us in this city, at this time, not for its great summers. However, because his heart desire is to see this city transformed. I.e. No poverty, no violence, no unemployment, no addictions, no brokenness. His heart is for a flourishing healthy city, and we the church of the city are his agents for this.

That is why the whole staff team and I are all committed to promoting church unity. Youth leaders, Baptist churches, city churches. Why? It is God's command and because no one congregation can change a city but only the church working together.

We are serving the city by hosting leaders lunches. We are serving the city by organizing combined church services. We are serving the city as we send teams into the prison once a month We are serving the city as we host the bikers We are serving the city as we help with clean up day and environmental projects and as our children do morning teas to our police and others.

We are serving the city every time we do something to better the city in the name of Jesus. As a church, as individuals

The Hub project is part of our vision to have an outward facing building. At the moment our building says we are want to be anonymous , that we are closed and for insiders only and if you do get in, it says we are old fashioned and therefore we are irrelevant. Our building is not helping us face outward and serve the city As an eldership and ministry team we believe this is a key tool to help us fulfil what God has for us.

These 5 things are what we are giving attention to as we try to live out what it means Love God and Love others.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

The church has often done a better job of helping people love God than it has of helping people love others. Discuss this thought... do you agree? Why or why not?

Which of the 5 priorities to you think we as a church are doing well at? Which do you think we need to work on at the moment? Email me your thoughts as a group to keith@icbc.org.nz

How do we encourage those without children to at church to see that they have a vital role in helping our children?

How do we create a church culture that is passionate about seeing people come to faith?

What would your workplace or neighborhood look like if God's kingdom were to come?



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