

When we were on holiday in Norfolk recently, we visited the National Trust Blickling Hall estate. They were celebrating 75 years since the estate was given to them in Lord Lothian's will. Lord Lothian was responsible (amongst a great many other things) for the act which allowed property to be left to the National Trust in lieu of death duties. Their trail around the house was punctuated with information about his life, and the lives of those working on the estate, all with the theme of '*Why are you here?*'

When Steve Uppal was speaking a couple of weeks ago, he started by saying he'd been asking God *why he was here*. The sermon he gave after that, not the one he had planned, spoke right into the heart of what God has been saying to me about the future and direction. I've heard messages from Craig Groeschel, read books by Bill Hybels and had conversations with and messages from Dave, plus many others that I'm probably not even aware of. As you should hope, this tied in with my own bible reading and prayer times. I'm as certain as I can be that the net effect, albeit probably badly delivered by me, is what God is trying to get through to us as a church.

Why are you here?

There are many reasons each of us could be here.

- Habit – it's what we always do
- Social – To meet with people we like. Or with people we don't like perhaps.
- To worship God
- To learn from the teaching
- Because our parents make us.

Probably in reality, it's a combination of more than one of the above, but you could do those things in any church. Some of them you can do in the pub, the football ground or the bowling alley.

Why do we come to *this* church and not go somewhere else?

Hopefully, it's because this is the church God has called us to go to. I know there are weeks when we all feel it would be easier to pack up and go somewhere else. Somewhere with less responsibility, or more people to share the work. Perhaps somewhere they don't nag about something as much. I certainly feel that way sometimes, and I'm sure Dave does as well. The fact that we're still here despite these things must mean God has a reason for us to be here.

Why are we here?

So collectively, as a church, why are we here?

Why is the church physically where it is, and why has it not folded up and gone its separate ways?

This year apparently marks the 90th anniversary not just of the Queen's birthday, but of our church's birth as well. We have a lot of history behind us. I've been involved here for nearly 17 years, but even that's barely a scratch on 90 years of work. There have been great times of growth and times of discord. Times of great work and of splits in the congregation. These things can and do happen in any church, and are uplifting or heartbreaking in turn.

Over the past years, we have been through a season where we have shrunk. Frequently, this is known as a season of 'pruning' - a good thing, removing the unproductive parts, and allowing time for the rest of the church to grow after the pruning is complete.

The trouble is we haven't grown. The pruning stopped and we didn't do a good enough job of taking stock and pushing on into the next season.

That's not to say nothing was happening – there's been good work going on all the time I've been here in various forms. We're not dead, we're just plodding on with the same old types of work we've always done and waiting for the next season to roll around. When the season of growth I'm sure we have all been hoping for didn't come we have settled into something of a 'season of malaise' as I recently heard it described.

The trouble with this malaise, is that it leads to a decline in almost every area of the church – energy levels drop, some work will die off and other work may continue but be unfocussed and ultimately unproductive. When this happens, despondency sets in and death becomes the inevitable end game.

Since the eldership election, God has been seriously challenging me to step up and actually *lead* the church. It has been far too easy to concentrate on the details of work that needs doing and to ignore the big issues in the church. That's Dave's job, or God's job. I'm just an ordinary elder.

In the past weeks, I have spent longer in prayer, at more silly times, than probably any other time in my life (and I'm not claiming to be perfect here – it's still somewhat embarrassing quite how little that is compared to some people I know of or hear about). I've asked God what He wants us to do, how he wants us to lead and most importantly what His heart is for this church. A church without a vision for the heart of God at it's own heart will only go one way – down.

The vision God gave us has been the same for at least the 17 years I've been here. We are a community church. We're here for the community about us.

Have I heard from God that this should change? No.

Have I read anything in the bible to convince me this should change? No.

Have I heard anything from other Godly preachers to make me think this should change? No.

Has anyone at all told me that they think this is no longer the case? Funnily enough, no.

Quite the opposite in fact – as I spent time talking to God and reading the bible and listening to messages and sermons or reading books from other preachers I have become increasingly sure that it categorically has not changed.

God's heart for this community has not changed in the 90 years we've been working in it. He loves it as deeply and as passionately as he always has.

In Springbourne for a Purpose.

Isaiah 43: 18-19 says (MSG) *"Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands."*

As I said, Steve Uppal started his talk by saying he was questioning God about why he was here. I want to bring a few points I noted from Steve's talk:

- The best is yet to come
- Get ready for what's going to happen

Vision Renewal – June 2016



- Lift up your vision and see what God is up to
 - Isaiah 43 and Josuah 6 – *See I have given you Jericho* – God told them to see something that to ordinary sight was completely unrealistic.
- He talked about our 'phenomenal strategic location' - comparing it with his in the middle of an industrial/commercial area.
- His phrase – “every touch leaves a trace”.
- We need to be catching a vision from the Holy Spirit
 - His regular prayer – Help me see what you see and hear what you hear
- Making small adjustments in course – not a u-turn

That last point really struck me, because at the time I felt as if we really needed a u-turn. Given how close to the mark everything else he said was, this seemed so wrong for us. But God's heart for the community was already clear in my mind at that point (I remember this, because I burst into tears when he mentioned our strategic location). I realised later that this is not a u-turn. It's barely even a course correction at all. We really just need to stop drifting, to catch the vision again. To start up our engines and be ready for what's going to happen.

The vision hasn't changed, and that may be a disappointment to some people who were hoping for some great new revelation, but I didn't set the vision, I'm just passing on what God has shown to me. We've been so focussed on the work, the building, the numbers that we have lost the heart of the vision – God's heart for the community. God's love for these people.

If we are to be here for a purpose, and to fulfil that purpose then we need to rediscover God's vision. We need to begin...

The Great Rediscovery

We need to

- Rediscover our community
- Rediscover our calling
 - As a church
 - As individuals – I'll talk more about that on the 10th.
- Rediscover our compassion

The vision of this church is the same as it's always been – from the same heart of God, prompted by the same Holy Spirit and based on the example of the same Jesus, in the same bible.

But just because the vision is the same, it doesn't mean nothing's going to change. We have to rediscover this vision. We have to regain the fire to see the salvation of the people around us. We have to break our hearts once again for the people who are hurting and suffering outside these doors.

We are in a unique location among the people – there is *no other church* focussed on these people. We're it.

We're called to love them

That is the vision

That is our purpose.

The Plan

Listen to this message at <http://springbourne.org/vision2016>

Vision Renewal – June 2016



We have a plan. We're going to outline this on the 17th July. Please be here if it's at all possible.

Obviously we'll have notes and handouts which we'll distribute to anyone who isn't here, but it's going to be a discussion as well as an announcement – the more of you who can be here the better.

The plan doesn't lead to an end, not to a larger congregation or more money. It doesn't even really lead to a beginning. But hopefully, with your help and God's power it will lead to a place where we're ready to begin.

When my Grandma died they found something written in her bible that I'd like to read for you.

God does not open paths for us in advance of our coming. He does not promise help before help is needed. He does not remove obstacles out of our way before we reach them. We often forget this and expect that He will make plan the path miles ahead yet He has promised help step by step.

The disciples didn't know how their lives would change when they left their work and followed Jesus. We don't know how our lives or our church is going to change when we follow God's heart, but I can promise you one thing – it will change.

God doesn't give out the whole story in one go. He just tells you the next step and waits for you to take it. Where you go after that you'll only find out once you've started on the journey.

But that's OK, I've promised Him the rest of my life anyway.

If you step out of the boat, your feet are going to get wet, but if you stay in the boat you never see the power putting your trust in God.

I'm getting out of the boat, wet feet or not. Will you join me?

"Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands."