



The Vision

Intro

Proverbs 29:18 *Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint [perish] – ESV*

And this prophetic vision was given to the church by Jesus just before returning to heaven

Mathew 28:19-20 *...go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age*

So this is the prophetic vision given to **every** church by Jesus

- What has been called the Great Commission - "**Go and make disciples**"

This is the overarching principle for each and every church

- But each church has to particularise that principle
- Each church needs to ask the question – "*what does that mean for us?*"

So that's what we are going to consider

- "*Go and make disciples?*" – what does that mean for SVC

Background

I was ordained in 2001 and was appointed Associate Minister of Christ Church Pennington (CCP).

NB my comments concerning CCP refer to how it was over 15 years ago

I had had a growing concern - CCP was a thriving church BUT

- there were areas of the parish we found difficult to reach
 - our congregation was primarily of one people-group – middle/lower middle class.
- why didn't we see many people from other groups?
 - those on the margins of society, those suffering from debt, those with poor life experience, the jobless, the homeless etc?

I spent a great deal of time thinking this through and came to many conclusions but primarily:

1. The style of CofE worship, particularly the language of the liturgy, was inappropriate for them
2. Because the makeup of the CCP congregation was primarily middle/lower middle class the feel of the church reflected this and was off-putting to them

But I couldn't see a way forward without the danger of losing the existing congregation

During 2006 I read articles by Tim Keller on Church Planting¹

A Church Plant, starting a new church, seemed to offer a solution to my dilemma.

- A new style of church specifically suited to a new worshipping community
- This new church would not be detrimental to the successful ministry of CCP.

¹ http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Why_Plant_Churches-Keller.pdf

I mentioned this to the then vicar, Tony Butterworth, who been thinking along similar lines!

- After prayer and consideration we felt it was from God and the seeds of SVC were sown.

We felt it important that the middle class feel of CCP didn't seep into the new church plant

- So we agreed the new church plant was to be a church
 - that met in a neutral place away from the CCP building
 - with a distinct, separate, worshipping community.

The Dream Materialises

In late 2008, after nearly two years preparation, the dream materialised with The Sports Village Church opening its doors.

The 2 Year Preparation Period - Considerations

The Christian church right from the beginning was called to be missional

- To go with the good news about Jesus Christ with the aim of people becoming His disciples

But Michael Green (CofE theologian) in his commentary on this passage writes this

The Great Commission is always directed outwards, to the unreached. The Christian church must never degenerate into a comfortable club for the like-minded... Unfortunately many churches in the West have...

So why did Michael Green write this in 1988?

The Decline of Christian Culture in Britain

Since second world war we have seen the impact of two major philosophical developments

1) Post-modernism

- There is no such thing as absolute truth – truth out there that is true for everybody
- Truth in the main is subjective therefore there can be many truths
- One of the bedrocks of Christianity is contained in Christ's words "*I am the way, and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through by Me*" – John 14:6
- The post-modern mind finds this absolute truth statement incomprehensible

2) Scientism

- Science is the only source of real knowledge
 - Can't scientifically discover the human soul – so it doesn't exist
 - The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be – Carl Sagan
- There was now no room for God in our world

Post-Christianity

Because of the impact of these two and other philosophies our culture has become increasingly post-Christian or even anti-Christian

Our culture is no longer Christian

What was the response from the Church to these changes?

The *Great Commission* became the *Great Retreat* - the church retreated on two fronts:

Some churches:

- Continued to emphasise the traditional beliefs of Christianity
- but ditched social action - withdrew from society - ghetto mentality – us vs. them

Other churches:

- Continued to emphasise social action
- but ditched the traditional beliefs of Christianity that conflicted with the new culture
 - eg “*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me*” – John 14:6

Either way the missional calling of the Great Commission was abandoned – The Great Retreat!

Most churches went into numerical decline – the Great Retreat

But things are changing now – many churches are taking the call to be missional seriously
The old ways no longer work (eg the big Billy Graham rallies) but new ways are being found

SVC – the Missional Calling – The Great Advance

I believe God called us to develop a missional church that

- Didn't give up on teaching traditional beliefs and the Great Commission
- Didn't give up on social action towards its target people group

How have we tried to fulfil this Missional Calling?

The old evangelistic methods don't work

- So what is SVC's vision from God to fulfil its mission to make disciples

1) Need to make contact with people

First Contact - Emotional Response

Postmodern people are suspicious of rational arguments – guided more by emotions

People generally have to be convinced emotionally before they will listen to rational arguments.
The question is unlikely to be:

“Can you explain how Newton's law of Cause and Effect proves there is a creator”

But more likely:

“You say God loves me. If so then show me with your actions that He loves me”

We satisfy these emotional requirements in many ways eg.

- Christians Against Poverty – more about that later
- Community Fund

But this is not enough:

God wants to bless them for all eternity not just 3 score and ten

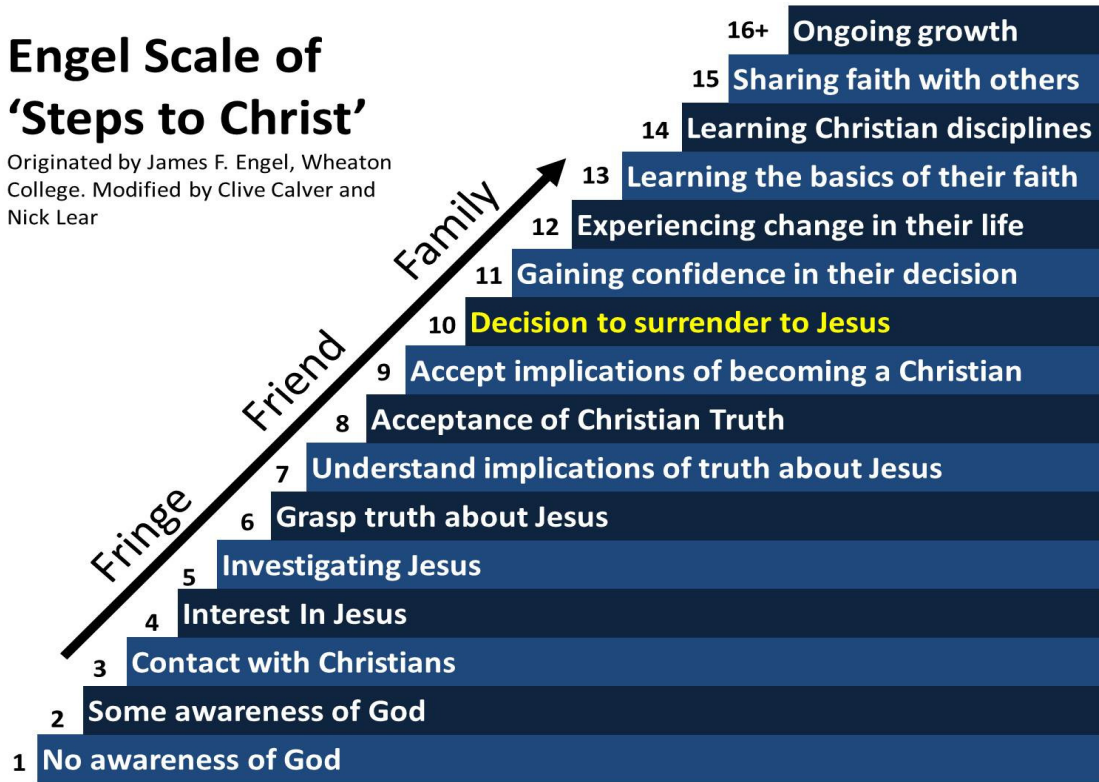
It cannot stop here – the gospel must be explained to them

But how do we do this when for most people “Jesus Christ” is merely a swear word?

Let's look at the Engel Scale

Engel Scale of 'Steps to Christ'

Originated by James F. Engel, Wheaton College. Modified by Clive Calver and Nick Lear



- In years gone by most non-Christian people in 3 to 9 range
- But we are now in post-Christian culture and most people are 1 – 2

There is a lot of input required to get people from 1 to 10

- It is thought that people require to hear the gospel at least 6 times before they can even understand it

So, having made a first contact with people through, say, our CAP ministry how do we keep contact with people so they can hear the gospel regularly

2) Need to keep contact with people

We have adopted a style of church that practices:

Belonging before believing

People need to feel welcome in our community even though they don't yet believe in Christ.

- They need to feel that they belong in our family.

This is why we aim to have loads of socials

- Day trips
- Women's group
- Men's group

These are bridge building, community building, relationship building events

These events aim primarily

- to build a loving Christian community
- to make non-Christians feel happy to be with us – that they belong

People who feel they belong to our community will probably, one day, feel like coming to church

3) Need to avoid unnecessarily putting people off

Sunday Church Meeting

OK, you are lovely people and I love being with you but what do you get up to on a Sunday

There will always be some tension here – non-Christian people will find us strange!

But if we have built relationships with them and they like being with us

- Maybe come through CAP
- Or enjoyed a few of our socials

Then they will feel a lot more comfortable with us

Relationship building is key – can't emphasise that enough

So, Sunday services will always seem a bit odd to non-Christian people but we don't need to make our services ridiculously odd

We, SVC leaders, have considered their position at great length eg:

Start time

4.30 seems an unusual time

Christians are used to getting up early for church at 10.30

But for many non-Christian people 10.30 doesn't exist!

Eat together before our worship starts

Eating together is a great social event – it relaxes, draws people closer – silences aren't as embarrassing

Worship

Modern, engaging, joyful, words on screen (karaoke), no books

Sermons

NB The truth will set people free but the truth is not always easy to understand

But there is no need to make it more difficult by using "in" words

Eg Fellowship, Church Plant (where do we keep this plant and how often do we water it!)

Or theological words

Eg propitiation, efficacious

Sometimes we have to use unusual words but we always try to explain them

We believe in appropriate teaching for all ages

- That's why we generally have Sunday groups rather than regular All Age services

Our Church Services aim to move people from 1 to 16+ on the Engel scale

4) Need to encourage people to submit their lives to Christ

Christianity Explored Course

A course for a small group meeting in a home for 8 weeks

For people 4 – 13

5) Need to encourage people to become disciples

Life Groups

Small groups of people (younger and older) meeting each week for

- Mutual support and care
- More intimate worship
- Bible study that is more specific
- Developing spiritual gifts
- Developing prayer ministry

These groups aim primarily at moving people from 10 to 16+

Source Group

Every 2 months

A more in-depth Bible Study for those who want to dig deeper

This aims primarily at moving people from 10 to 16+

Prayer Breakfasts

Once a month on a Saturday morning

This is the power house where prayer is offered to God

These aim primarily at moving people from 10 to 16+

SVC's Missional Calling – thought through in great detail

That is a brief overview of the rationale behind SVC's missional calling:

- We have thought long and hard about the changes that have taken place in our society
- We have thought long and hard about how to fulfil the Great Commission now that the old methods don't work

We have adopted a vision that aims to move people

- from 1 to 16+ on the Engel scale
- from *No Awareness of God* to *Mature Christian Disciples*

Our Main Outreach Strategy - CAP

Some two years after SVC started God miraculously led us to CAP (Christians Against Poverty)

We started by setting up CAP Money courses, then a Debt Centre, followed by Life Skills

- And now in the process of setting up Job Club and just recently Release Group.

The CAP ministry is costly in financial terms and also human resources terms

- but we have seen so much fruit coming out of it.

We have seen lives changed and given hope,

- and many people coming to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.
- Lives changed for all eternity

Link between CAP ministry and SVC

We are seeing that people who come for help thru our CAP ministries value the community and relationships that develop with our CAP staff and volunteers.

- So when they come to church for the first time there are faces they already know

For me, relationships are the vital key for welcoming new people into SVC.

Quote from Laura Cochrane on Facebook Group - Sports Village Church

10 September 2017 18:46

As I stood at the front today looking out I noticed at every table there was either a cap client or an ex cap client - all made to feel welcome and a lot still coming to svc weeks after stopping working with cap. It made me smile and thank God for the CAP ministry - thank you to SVC for supporting it . As I was putting away my music tonight the song sheet "our God is an awesome God" was the first page I went to and you know -He is.

Summary

SVC - Church Plant set up to reach a specific people-group that CCP had found difficult

- Those on the margins of society, those suffering from debt, those with poor life experience, the jobless, the homeless etc.

Everything we do or think about doing should be tested against this

- Does it help to contact our target people-group?
- Does it help to promote an emotional response from our target people-group (does it make them think well of us because we show them love)?
- Does it help to create relationship and community that is attractive to our target-people group?
- Does it help to make converts to Christ?
- Does it help to make committed disciples of Christ?

So, the Challenge

The challenge is *To Boldly Go and Make Disciples*

The pressures we face from a culture that is becoming anti-Christian are the very things that

- Make our Christianity exciting, fulfilling, challenging, worthwhile

Here at SVC we are on the leading edge, at the coal face, where the rubber meets the road!

- We are here because we believe it is a prophetic vision from Jesus Himself.