

## Sermon 30 September 2018 'I have a dream.'

### John 15:1-8

When Jesus drew his picture of the vine, as related in our gospel reading, he knew what he was talking about. The vine was grown all over Palestine and it still is. The vine had become the symbol of the nation of Israel. It is a plant which needs a great deal of attention if the best fruit is to be got from it. So it is a symbol for growth, it is a symbol for fruitfulness. And that makes it a perfect symbol for what I want to talk about today.

I want to share with you a dream I have for our new church. It would no doubt be appropriate to launch with 'I have a dream today', echoing the now so famous words of Martin Luther King delivered on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC. However, I think that line is in danger of becoming a little hackneyed. Instead, I will call upon the words of William Blake, who wrote, 'Father, O Father! What do we hear in this land of unbelief and fear? The land of dreams is better far, above the light of the morning star.'

Apart from the word *dreams*, the other important words here are *unbelief and fear*. I will come back to them shortly.

Before I reveal something of the dream I have, can I just say that it's good to have dreams. Dreams are something we would really like to attain but invariably there is something of a gap between that ultimate goal and reality. And that's ok. That doesn't matter. We must always have that aspiration, that hope to reach for. If we are not reaching higher, we stop growing. And if we stop growing, we die. So we must dream, it's good, it's important.

But we mustn't just dream. Dreams are a complete and utter waste of time if we don't strive to bring those dreams to fruition. We might never get there, but in trying to get there, we assuredly lift our game, we move on, we make progress.

So what is my dream? Can I begin by saying that I don't want, at this stage, to get into too much in the way of specifics. Until things are, if not actually embedded into place, but certainly well down the planning path, one can end up looking a little foolish. However, I do have a dream of the role our new church can play in our community.

Next month (Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October), our architect, John McClean, will be giving a presentation at our Sunday service. He will be showing where we have got to in terms of the plans, and will be inviting feedback from our congregation. It will be apparent when you see those plans that we have catered for the ability to hold a variety of programmes within the precinct of our construction. What will those programmes be? That's where I would prefer not to get into specifics. I do have specifics in mind and I am very happy to talk to you in person about those.

Suffice to say, I believe that as a church we need to reach out to our community. We live in a society which I believe needs renewal. I go back to those two words used by William Blake, *unbelief and fear*. In June a special report was published in the Herald headed 'Losing Faith.' Bottom line, fewer Kiwis are going to church. Fewer Kiwis believe in God. Fewer Kiwis see the relevance or need for God. And yet ironically, there has never been more of a need for God in our lives than right now. There is a sense of hopelessness, of frustration, of gloom prevailing in our society. There are a myriad of factors contributing to this, but it is harshly and vividly reflected in statistics of domestic violence, crime, suicide.

Exacerbating this is a political climate of *fear*. America, our so-called leader of the Western world, is but an extreme example of this. It's about distrust, it's about looking after number one. We need that like a hole in the head. Right now we need a society where we look after and care for one another, where we are kind to one another, where we are non-judgmental of

one another. Surely, this is what being a Christian is all about. In today's climate we cannot afford to turn our back on God, to turn our back on what God can offer through his church, through the teaching and ministry of Christ, through his people. It is ironic that at a time when people are choosing to ignore God that never has the need for Christ's body, the Church, been of greater importance and necessity. I have a dream that our church can play this role in our community.

Now, you are probably sitting there thinking 'that is all very well, but how are we, a small congregation as we are, going to achieve all that?' I don't blame you for thinking that, but that is part of my dream. We have to grow, and I am not sure what comes first, the chicken or the egg, but I really do believe that our new church will be an integral part of that growth. I believe our new church will make a powerful statement to our community that we are open for business, and that more importantly, we mean business.

Our new church will give us the scope to do more in the domain of worship. Music is one thing that immediately springs to mind. There are other possibilities. But we can get out into the community and sell ourselves, and we will have the space to accommodate those who hear our call.

We live in a mushrooming community. Homes are springing up in their thousands. The challenge for us is massive and it is exciting. I know that it has been a long and frustrating road to reach where we are right now, but God's time is always right, and I believe his time has come and we as his disciples, as Christ's disciples, are privileged to be part of his plan, and we are called to do our little bit to see that his plan comes to fruition.

I want to finish by making this point. We are a diverse congregation, which is a true reflection of our community. I see a diversity of ages, of cultures, of personalities. That is undoubtedly a strength. There is the story of a Japanese man who stood up to speak at a community meeting. In broken English he said, 'I am father. I am like coconut - hard outside, soft inside. This is mother. She is like peach - soft and lovely outside, hard inside. This is son. He is like banana - soft outside, soft inside, and slippery. This daughter. She is like chestnut - prickly outside and explodes when heated. But altogether, we make very good fruit salad.'

My friends, we are undoubtedly an excellent fruit salad. And together we are going to make a difference in our community. That is my dream.