

Text: John 15.16  
St Stephen's

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Sat PM/Sun AM

## Things We Must Do

One of my good friends a few weeks ago said to me, Geoff, **what is the vision of this church?** Now they have been as involved around here as anyone, and I thought, “Really? Do you really not know that?” Then I thought, “Well, it has been so long since I have talked about vision...” Isn't it true that **vision fades?** Do you know what I mean? You can have a **mountain top experience** in your life and two weeks later you **hardly remember** what you did! The problem is, **we have good ‘forgetters’.**

So I want to speak to you today about **our vision at St Stephens.** When I thought, how could I do this to be helpful, I originally thought I would talk to you about ‘**mistakes I have made**’ over the last 10 years, but I could never get it done in 25 mins, and I didn't think that we have enough chairs to seat all the people who would want to come and hear.

So I thought, “If I had just **four sentences** to sum up what I believe will mark our next decade together...” what would they be? Well... here we go... #1

### **The Gospel Is About Jesus' Grace and It Is Good News:**

#### *I Will Daily Receive From Christ*

**Grace** is **God's unmerited love** given through Jesus... It is the heart of the Gospel, and it is about the **most powerful force** in the universe. When you unpack God's grace-love you find it means He loves **first**, he loves **always**, he loves **completely**, he loves **freely**... His love is not something we can **earn or deserve**, and it is **not based on what we do**, but it is something we can **receive**.

“Freely, Freely” **Jesus gives.** To all who will take, **Jesus gives** his forgiveness. He gives a fresh start, a new life. He gives his presence and his power and his purposes for life. He gives his friendship, his Spirit, his truth, his eternity, his promises... the list goes on! He gives “**without cost**” for he himself has paid the cost. There is no better news in life than this! **Say**, “That's Good News”.

You might say, “**I believe that**, I really do.” But **don't blow right by this.** We have heard it so much, that we are in danger of becoming at ease with it – and it is **far too radical** to let us be at ease. The truth is that God's grace-love is **freely given, but not easy to receive.** We actually **fight it.** Because deep down, we believe **love ought to be earned.**

**Martin Luther's great insight into human nature** was that **this resistance to grace-love** is the **default mode of every human heart.** It is the way you naturally operate. It is **your autopilot.** Down deep, here is what we think:

- Good people keep the rules and bad people break them.

- Good people are loved by God and bad people aren't.
- "I need to be good then God will love me."

This is '**self-salvation**'. Self salvation says, 'I will be good then I will have **earned** God's approval and love. God will **owe me** that.' It is a real problem because in our arrogance, we imagine we can get to a place where the **God** of the universe **owes us**, **must** make us his favorites, because **we have** ('done it the old fashioned way') **earned it**. People like this are tough to live with! Aren't you!

**Luther's insight:** this is the default mode of the human heart **before your conversion and after your conversion**. Even after your conversion your heart continues to resist grace-love! **Our hearts need to be healed**, at the very deepest level. How do you heal a heart all the way down? The **best medicine is grace**. Grace every day. So this is #1 on God's vision list for us. We must come to the well of Christ's grace every day, with hands open and **hearts open and honesty** about our frailty and need. We must **learn how to receive**.

**So... How do you do at receiving from God?**

**One hint** is how you **receive from people**. One of our members in the hospital said she was having such a struggle with her pride. Why? For the first time she had to depend on others... Ever felt like that? There's that 'I don't need any help' autopilot again.

**Another hint** at how you do at receiving is **how happy you are**. The happiest people receive very well – 'like children', Jesus said. And because God loves to give, they are really happy, deeply blessed. You know, we are not nearly so happy as God intends to make us!

**We must learn how to receive.**

Times of **prayer** like that have gotten more and more important to our Vestry and our staff.

That means stopping every day to think about **verses like this:**

*From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.*

John 1:12-13, 16 (NLT)

Haven't you? Couldn't you make a list? Isn't it easy to lose sight of that list?

*"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."* Luke 12:32

Wow! **Pleased** to give **you**... the **kingdom**! He is! He does! When was the last time you thought about that? Asked him for that? Thanked him for that?

**When grace goes deep**, we begin to believe that we are accepted in Christ, beloved of God, then we will **no longer need to justify ourselves**. We don't need to **think that we are better** than other people. We don't have to **take pride** in our looks, or our intelligence, or

our accomplishments, or our race, or our leaders, or our socio-economic status - and **put other people down**. Look how Paul said it to the Corinthians...

*So then, no more boasting about men!*

*All things are yours, [leaders...] or the world or life or death or the present or the future... 1 Cor 3:21-23*

These 5 are the **ultimate fears of life** – and now they are all your servants! **J Edwards' 1<sup>st</sup> sermon**: “A Christian Happiness, “*your bad things will turn out for good, the good things you have can never be taken away from you, the best things are yet to come...*”

That is the healing **medicine of grace**.

To be honest with you, I think **during my past 11 years** I have been better at helping you think about your own commitment to Christ than his commitment to you. More about your decision for him than his decision for you. I would like to **change that**. I would like to help you think deeply about his commitment to you. His decision for you. His unshakable love for you... how He loves **first**, loves **always**, loves **completely**, loves **last**. I would love it if we were **known for this** – “Oh, that’s the church where they talk all the time about Jesus’ grace and Jesus’ love... - and you know, I don’t think I’ve ever seen a bunch of happier people!” I say, “**This we must do!**”

### **Believing In Jesus Means Following Him:**

*I Will Learn From Him How to Live All My Life*

I have come to the conclusion of my sabbatical months that **too often the Gospel we evangelicals preach isn’t the whole gospel of the Bible**. The Gospel we preach is that through Christ we find **forgiveness for our past** and **hope for our future**. That is certainly true. But **what about our ‘todays’?** How do we live here and now?

Well, we have had **no clear answer**. I mean we know that we want to stay inside **certain boundaries**, but we don’t exactly know what it means to live for Jesus in the **workplace** and in our **homes** and during our **recreational hours** and what about our **emotions** and **thoughts** and **bodies**, and – oh yea - our **money** and our **relationships** - the list goes on. So what we do is we just **live like everyone else** lives around us, and **we drift** along with the culture. And eventually **that will fail us**. So there must be a better answer. I think it comes in these two little words,

*“Follow me,”* Luke 5:27

When Jesus said that, he certainly meant, “Obey my commands...

*“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”*

Luke 6:46

Then you find out that is pretty hard, and you come back to him and ask, “How, Lord?” and you find paragraphs like this...

*“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Matt 11:28-30

Say, “*Come to me... Learn from me.*”

I think what he means by that is ‘**learn from me how to live your lives.**’ Have confidence that **Jesus knows more about life than you do**, so learn from him how to live your ‘todays’. How to live for him in the workplace, home, thoughts, emotions, body, money, relationships

....

- That means **digging into his Word**. Listening, really listening deeply to his voice. (Sandwich model by next September)
- That means a new willingness **to pray much, often, and always**. Listening for the leading of Jesus and waiting together for the leading of Jesus,
- **Giving him access to all your life**, all your decisions, all your dreams. And all along the way, thinking of yourself as **his follower**. His disciple. His student. You ask him to teach you how to live your life, all your life, every one of your todays.

I say, “**This we must do!**”

## **Believing in Jesus Means Loving His Family:**

### ***I Will Join a Fellowship Circle of Care and Growth***

We **love our independence**. It is the default mode of our hearts. We think that **happiness** is the result of independence, but happiness comes not from independence, but from **interdependence**. That is true because **God is interdependent**. The Son loves the Father and the Father loves the Son. God wired you to be like him. So we were made for love, made to **need each other**.

*Since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.*

Romans 12:5b (NLT)

We need people because **no one should have to...**

- Face life’s dangers alone. They can overwhelm you.
- Carry life’s heartaches alone. They will break you.
- Shoulder life’s burdens alone. They will exhaust you.
- Cope with life’s temptations alone. They will confuse you.
- Walk life’s paths alone. That will just harden you.

Everyone needs a few people in our lives that **we know** really well, who **know us** really well, people who will walk with us through life. That’s why God put you in a **spiritual family**.

*Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts...*

Acts 2:42, 46

Two years ago we said that we were going to make a change in the fundamental structure of our life in this church. We were going to become not just a church with small groups, but a **church of small groups**. We said that because we believe that ‘life goes better together’.

To be honest, **this has been hard** for us. It has been **hard for me**, and given me cause to think deeply about my life. As your years go on, you do that. And you ask probing questions about **things that really matter... like love, and people, and friendships**. When I have paused for those questions, I know right away that I want to **spend more time with people**. I know right away that I have focused **too much** in the past on **strategy and administration** and **not enough on people** and friendships and love. I don't want to do that anymore. Do you?

Could we **plant that flag in this church**? This is going to be a place where we love each other, take time for people, and have deeper friendships with people, where we do life together? Wouldn't that make your life richer? So I say, **"This we must do!"**

### **Believing in Jesus Means Joining His Disciple Making Mission:**

#### ***I Will Reach Out with His Compassion and Gospel***

We spent a lot of time earlier this year thinking about lostness. People get **lost**. And Jesus repeatedly said **that is why he came**. We forget that sometimes. Before his ascension he gave us our standing orders...

*"...go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always..."*

Matt 28:18-20

That is our task, going after people with the grace of Jesus and this remarkable power of Jesus to capture every part of our lives for his Kingdom purposes and bringing people into his family and teaching them how to live for him. It is our mission, and **the mission is everything**. "God changed lives" is how we sum it up. It means joining Jesus in his disciple-making mission. He has **chosen us** for this task,

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.*

John 15:16

What he is saying is that he has **picked us for his team...** and he wants us to get into the disciple-making game. Too many of us have been **content to warm a pew**, sit on the bench, say our prayers... and just flat out miss the exhilaration of working in a partnership with Jesus for God-changed lives... God chose you for more. This is why St Stephens is here. We have no other reason for being here but to make disciples of Jesus.

There are too many of you who have not yet made the thrilling discovery of what God can do with you on a mission team, on a ministry team. God did not pick you to warm a bench. He picked you to get out on the field. This summer we are going to have a **special series...** **"Giving Back"** – the last part of it will be about finding your place on the team.

**This is such a dramatic time in our world.** Old structures are coming down. Western culture is become flat out hostile... But the opportunities to lead and build are all over the place. The doors are open.

We **need a fresh wave** of people who must daily stand under his river of grace and drink its healing waters. Hungry people who must **be like Jesus**. Live like him, learn from him, walk with him, make our todays count for him. We need students of Jesus.

We need people who **must have more friendships** that are anchored in a living faith, and who must have a team around them to meet the challenges of life with a strengthened faith in Jesus. We need disciples of Jesus.

We need people who **must get off the bench and into the game** because they know they were hand picked to do just that. People who will risk much, give without counting the cost, get creative beyond their wildest dreams and live on the edge for the sake of the mission. Because this mission matters. We need followers of Jesus.

What say you?

For the sake of Christ and his cause, I will work, I will risk, I will give, I will live!