

# A Vision Of DIVERSITY

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[ 0 : 00 ] 28th of August 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC and delivered what is regarded as one of the top five speeches of the 20th century and certainly for the English speaking world. He said, I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed that we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal. I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day, even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice and sweltering with the heat of oppression will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children one day live in a nation that will not judge them by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream today. He articulated and symbolized a great dream, a vision of racial harmony and social justice and peace and unity, a vision that he himself unfortunately did not see to materialize.

It is, however, a dream that I would suggest aligns with God's purposes for his world and for all people. I believe it's a dream that must start with Christians embracing the Lord Jesus. It must start with the local church and it must start here at St. Paul's Chatswood. Our vision, as I launched last week, we're in a vision series and launched last week a new vision for us and our vision is to be united in our desperation for the world around us to encounter Jesus and in our desire to represent the diversity of Chatswood. I talked a lot last week about unity. This week, I want to focus on the idea of diversity for us as a church. Our vision is to be united in our desire to represent the diversity of Chatswood. God's vision, as we just heard from God's word, is a vision for all people. The vision that we're looking, working our way through in the course of these four weeks of vision series is far greater than Martin Luther King's vision of a racial harmony of the United States or even beyond the United States. Our vision is intimately connected to God's vision of all things. The biblical vision, let me say what I intend on doing in this next little while is to preach the Bible to you. So we're going to begin Genesis chapter one and see God's vision unfold really, really quickly. The biblical vision starts beginning of the Bible in Genesis one, where God creates all things. He creates all people, two of them at this point, in his image.

In his image. And every person who's ever walked the face of the earth from that moment carries the image of God. There is solidarity for all people. We all are created equal.

It's not just a constitutional thing for the United States. All people are created equal. But as we have solidarity in image, so we also have solidarity in our sin. In Genesis chapter three, Adam and Eve reject God's rule over their life. And every human being who's walked the face of the earth since that has followed in their footsteps. And we, from the point of conception, are flawed.

[ 3 : 41 ] Our image of God is marred by sin. We have all sinned and we fall short of God's purposes for our lives. Romans chapter three. And one of the big consequences of that is God's judgment upon all people. And you see it played out in terms of the nations in Genesis chapter 11, where he scatters people. He confuses their language so that they would not work together in order to dethrone him as the Lord of all.

And yet God doesn't just act in judgment. He doesn't leave us in that place because he sets about a plan to reverse it all in Genesis chapter 12, the beginning there, verses one to three. But Genesis 12 is the hinge point of the Bible. It's the turning point of scripture. It's the beginning of God's plan of redemption that began with a promise to a bloke named Abram, that all peoples of the earth will be blessed through him. And God's call of Abraham here is a direct response to the disastrous human situation of Genesis 3 to 11. God's focus is on Abraham and it's not an exclusive focus, but to use this individual, an unimpressive individual, and his descendants to bless and deliver the entire human race. And that means that God's solution to our sin reaches its final goal when it includes all

peoples, all nations of the earth.

The purpose of God choosing Israel was to witness to the universal power and love and magnificence of God for all people. God's plan for all the nations is amazing in its scope and its vision.

And that's what you see right through the rest of the Bible, including the Old Testament, which appears to be so centered on the people of Israel. Psalm 67, the nations will benefit from the Abrahamic blessing of Israel. The nations will come to worship the living God in Psalm 22, 86, 102, 138, 145, Isaiah 2, 12, 42, 45.

The nations will be included within Israel as the standard people of God, as God's purposes are worked out, as such a way that they'll be registered in God's holy city in Psalm 87.

[ 6 : 22 ] They'll be blessed with God's salvation in Isaiah 19. They'll be accepted into God's house in Isaiah 56. They'll be called by God's name in Amos 9. They'll be joined with God's people in Zechariah 2.

Just to name a few. It is absolutely essential for us to see that God is not a racist in any way whatsoever. He doesn't have favorites. The choosing of Israel was not for ethnocentric purposes. It was for universal redemption.

But Israel failed consistently in living out that purpose. They consistently displayed sinful prejudice, apathy, racial pride. They consistently forgot the reason God chose them.

And God's plan of redemption, which started with the promise to Abraham, was not thwarted in any way, but it continued on and finds its fulfillment in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

You see, with the arrival of the Lord Jesus, you see this very early on in the Gospels, was a radically new way of defining what it meant to be part of the people of God, start to be expressed with clarity from the person of Jesus.

[ 7 : 48 ] And it wasn't ethnically defined. It was defined by faith in the Lord Jesus. You see, with Abraham, God set in motion a plan of redemption that overtones every curse for everyone who receives the blessing of Abraham.

And that blessing is the forgiveness of sins, acceptance by God, that comes through Jesus Christ, the descendant of Abraham. Galatians 3, 13 and 14 says it, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

For it is written, Cursed is anyone who is hung on a tree. That is, what it's saying there is that Jesus redeemed all people by his death on the cross. He redeemed us in order that the blessing that was given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.

It's for all people. God's redemptive plan has always been to save and to bless peoples from all peoples of the earth and to unite them together with him as his people through the Lord Jesus.

It is the center of the Christian message. We refer to it as the Gospel, the good news about Jesus. It's redemption with our Creator God, being redeemed, united with him, and united with all people.

[ 9 : 10 ] Galatians 2 refers to the Gospel as justification by faith. Justification is what a judge does in a courtroom. It's the declaration that a defendant is innocent because they are in fact innocent.

They are truly innocent. How does God declare rebellious humans to no longer be rebellious? When they've been rebellious?

Not by just going, Oh, let's just love everyone and forget about it. No, by judging it.

By dealing with it. By giving it the right condemnation. Someone has to jump in to be the substitute. Someone has to take the place of the guilty, to suffer the just punishment for the guilty.

And as we saw last week, that was Jesus. Jesus Christ lived and died to bear our punishment and provide for us a right standing before God. Justification by faith puts all people on a level playing ground.

[ 10 : 18 ] That's what justification by faith does. It's a level playing ground for all people. We are all utterly dependent upon God's grace to us in the Lord Jesus.

No one is different. And justification smashes pride. It's why we have a core value written on the wall just out there called humble authenticity. The Gospel smashes pride.

Justification by faith is at the center of the Christian faith and many new and sweet and tender and deep and strong and beautiful and noble and humble and kind and wise and patient and caring and serving attitudes and behaviors that flow directly from that.

And one of which is the breaking down of the hostile barriers and suspicion that gets built up between people who are different than us. It breaks the barriers builds us together as one new

humanity and that's how Galatians 3 puts it you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free male nor female male nor female male nor female male nor female if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise of Abraham back in Genesis 12.

When Paul states here that there's neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free male nor free male what he does here is he strikes at the heart of three of the major barrier forming divisions in human society and certainly was the case in the first century ethnicity economic status and sexuality there was a Jewish prayer that was prayed in the first century that went like this and it's a prayer of thanksgiving blessed be he that he did not make me a Gentile blessed be he that he did not make me a slave or an ignorant peasant blessed be he that did not make me a woman now I'm assuming that that was only ever prayed in the men's breakfast at the temple the bacon free men's breakfast just egg rolls that's all it is just egg rolls and what the Christian gospel does is it smashes those barriers and forms a radical new society the old divisions are abolished the new community is formed and you see just after Jesus' resurrection in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit comes the church is formed and people of different races and generations and languages are there and the coming of the Holy Spirit is a symbolic reversal of the judgment of

[13:18] Genesis 11 with the Tower of Babel where God scatters and confuses their language people who were once scattered and frustrated are gathered together under Jesus and even language on that day is not a barrier as people hear hear God's plan of redemption in the Lord Jesus in their own tongue the blood of Jesus unites all people and what is symbolic in Acts chapter 2 is a reality of the final picture of all things final picture of all things in history in Revelation as we just saw in Revelation 5 in verse 9 John tells us why Jesus is worthy to open the book at the end of history so that things unfold according to the plan of God Jesus is worthy because of how his death relates to all races and tribes of the earth it says you are worthy to take the scroll to open its seals because you were slain and with your body you purchased men let me just purchase people for God from every tribe language nation and people and you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth it was God's design in the death and the resurrection of Jesus to ransom some from every kind of race and language and people and kingdoms and to make them one kingdom and as the king of the kingdom all people live with Jesus as their supreme treasure and lord every individual in this new humanity as you notice you have made them a kingdom of priests there's not a hierarchy of order here they're all priests they are all full time worshippers of the king that's what the priest's job was

Jesus died to ransom subjects for the king and worshipers for the king from every race and tribe and language the goal is for all those scattered from God will return to enjoy fellowship with him the scattered ones once separated from God and from each other are now brought together under the reign of Jesus and finding God's blessing his promise of blessing as God said to Abraham back in Genesis 12 we see it here in Revelation 5 fulfilled you can see it fulfilled in verses 11 sorry 13 and 14 then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them singing to him who sits on the throne to the lamb be praise and honor glory and power forever and ever the four living creatures said amen and the elders fell down and worshipped the elders fell down and worshipped and that is what all of creation is designed for this is what history is about this is what the nation is about this is what people is about this is what group is about this is what diversity is about this is what language is about this is what

St. Paul's is about this is what my life is about this is what your life is about and so it is inconceivable that we should believe that the goal of God in history and the aim of the death of his son is to gather all people and for us not to care about breaking down the barriers now in this city and this church between you and other people and me and other people.

The Christian gospel is the power of God that breaks down the dividing wall of hostility between Israelis and Palestinians and Russians and Poles and Nazis and Jews and white and black and male and female and old people and young and whatever other divisions are in there.

When our Redeemer and Great Reconciler and his gospel are what we hold as first importance which is what 1 Corinthians 15.3 says it is we are empowered to listen to those different perspectives and preferences evaluate fairly to change as we need and be proactive in reaching across those lines that have traditionally caused divisions amongst us.

[17:52] when Jesus is our greatest treasure we see that our lifelong preferences our lifelong treasures all those little idols that I spoke about last week are ultimately our hope they're not our hope they're not our security they're not our comfort it means that we will actually become eager to have them changed removed refined if it means less barriers to others embracing and treasuring the Lord Jesus with us you see when the cross is our salvation and our daily strength we're eager to crucify our pride and our love for self and our type and our comfort and our way we're empowered to take the extra steps extra steps to step across those dividing lines across generations across cultures with kindness with grace with a listening ear because my security is not in my preferences my comfort is not in my preferences my security my comfort my identity is wrapped up that I'm a child of a living God and so as I said last week there's a certain irony a terrible irony in this being as I launched into this vision last week that this is my passion this has been my ministry passion as a church for so, so long and yet for me to have an idol that results in me working against my passion I talked about it last week I encouraged you in the past week to go and look at your idols I've got other treasures and idols that get in the way of me pursuing God's vision of all things I said last week it was control and it's not all negative it's a positive thing I am the senior minister of St. Paul's and so there is an element that I ought to have a certain element of control but when that becomes the most important thing becomes the ultimate thing then it becomes a treasure it becomes an idol that displaces Jesus from being the greatest treasure of my life and the interesting thing about the idol of control is that your biggest emotion will be an emotion of worry when your idol is fed inflamed and pumping in your heart worry will be the thing that I'll be my greatest troubling emotion and what will people around me feel when it's really got my heart control's got my heart that's the idol that's the treasure that's really got my heart people around me will feel condemned isn't that ironic when we're trying to build a community of unity a unity around the Lord Jesus who says that there is no condemnation in him and so

I've walked away since July Steve you've got to work on this idol because it's impacting St. Paul's it's impacting my relationships it's impacting us as a church and the vision that God has for us as a church treasuring Jesus is the only solution and here's how the solution is for me for an idol control I go to those Bible passages they're in front of me all the time the Bible passages we talk about God's sovereignty over all things they are sweetness to my soul I've got to constantly remind that he is control of all things do you know the other Bible passages which is so so important for me is those Bible passages we speak about the grace of the Lord Jesus there's no condemnation in him I've got to keep both of those things together there's no condemnation in him the only way to displace an idol is to have a bigger one a greater affection and to see that Jesus is the one who gives you all that you need and all that you desire and so

I believe it is more than just unfortunate when our worldly associations and our identities are allowed to determine the composition of our churches I believe it works against the very nature of the Christian gospel and God's purposes here's a quote from an American theologian Michael Horton he said not that long ago evangelical missiologists were defending the separation of races based on the principle that people like to be with people who are like them South African theologians have pointed out that this principle in mission work laid the groundwork for apartheid an incredible evil now that racial segregation is less explicitly deployed as a church growth strategy I think he's being somewhat sarcastic at that point we carve up Christ's body into socio-economic and generational segments some churches use demographic marketing to appeal to different music styles with country western rock and jazz services it's what has been referred to as the homogenous unit principle like like to be with like we like to hang out with people who are like us it's a principle that was propagated by the church growth movement in the 1990s but has been in play for a long time since then it goes right back to the issues of racism and everything else it has led to churches planted to target specific demographics specific segregating segregations of people segregating corporate worship into individual preferences traditional services family services youth services

ABC services and a multitude of other services such as cowboy services even in the United States in Texas and you must ride a horse by the way that's true it might seem funny but it's true I know it's the United States and anything can happen especially you know in the next couple of days and let me tell you the homogenous unit principle is standard practice on the north shore of Sydney it's standard practice right throughout Sydney Diocese and it was standard practice here at St. Paul's until 2011 Martin Luther King once said that the most segregated hour in America is 11 o'clock on a

Sunday morning that was over 50 years ago but I believe the statement is true of a lot of churches in our city even today even though we have an integrated society our schools are integrated our places of work are integrated our neighbourhoods are integrated our social clubs are integrated and on Sunday morning we get in our cars we drive to our homogenous churches to worship our God who has called us to be united in the Lord Jesus by the power of his spirit and I am totally convinced that our homogenous circles of comfort are a hindrance to the gospel as we fail to display the beautiful picture that God has of all time in Revelation 5 and 7 and 9 it's so ironic that Christians have led some of the charge in pursuing racial and social justice as well as cross-cultural ministries across the other side of the world and yet it has not appeared to trickle down into interpersonal behaviour on the local church level it's phenomenal it's so much easier to pursue God's purposes when they don't interfere with my preferences when I can just give money to seeing the gospel reach somewhere at the other side of the world changes we have made here in St. Paul's in 2011 in our corporate worship was to move deliberately away from the homogenous unit principle in our corporate worship in our community groups and a bunch of other ministries the ordering principle of our corporate gatherings at St. Paul's is not personal preferences based on age stage of life ethnicity tradition music and the morning tea colours of carpet or anything else my personal preferences don't set the agenda of what we do when I say my personal preferences what I mean is my personal preferences even me as senior minister of St. Paul's it's our purpose as a church our vision our values they do

[ 26 : 53 ] God's glory does rather than valuing the comfort of like we started valuing the discomfort a shared discomfort when we gather together and that includes me let me tell you I think I've said this so many times but but there's still an assumption I've heard from a few people that the way we do church at St. Paul's right now is my preference there is I I do not recall a single Sunday where I've not had discomfort not a single Sunday where I've not had discomfort we don't do church according to my preference we've got a purpose we've got a vision and that what drives us but what I am so pleased about is that I look around at our English congregations today we have so much greater diversity than we did five years ago in fact even more than we did six months ago so much greater diversity did you know since we've been breaking down the modulus unit principle our

Chinese congregation has less Chinese members in it than the English congregations it's been a journey towards greater unity and diversity a journey that we are continuing and I assume that given that a whole bunch of people have come to St.

Paul since 2011 and we continue to grow you've found Christ here you've found a church family here I would suggest that this is at least one aspect of St. Paul's that we actually value so let me just take this vision statement a little bit further for us and point out some implications it says that we're united in our desire to represent the diversity of Chatswood now for those of you who get the technicalities of all this vision statement stuff you would know that a vision statement must be measurable must be measurable you need to be able to assess whether in fact you're pursuing your vision and that statement right there is the measurable bit in our vision statement every five years there's this thing called the census if it doesn't crash and there's a national church life survey that gets an evaluation of who we are as a people and it does evaluation of who the community is as a people and we get to compare those things and we get to go okay how we're tracking in our diversity we desire to represent the diversity of

Chatswood that is what we desire is we desire not to be a subculture within a culture our goal is to have that data so closely aligned as possible it is also a massive danger for Christians Christian churches to be a subculture within a culture in such a way that the two don't relate it's possibly so comfortable with one demographic group because of a long association and yet have no interest in another demographic group because their ways are just too foreign to us they're too strange to us they're even repulsive to us as a Christian subculture my vision is for us is to always be assessing whether we are reaching our community whether we're displaying the diversity of our community if we find that 50% of Chatswood are below the poverty line but we don't have anyone in this building who's below the poverty line I want to ask why is it the middle class or the upper middle class or the whatever class level of lower north shore that's hindering the mission that God's placed us in and if that's the case we need to change

I need to dress differently or something if 20% of Chatswood we discover has Icelandic heritage but we've got one member from Iceland in this church we need to buy some ice or something there's my narrow mindedness coming to play at that point or if 15% are of in our community are same sex

couples and we've got none here I want to ask why my vision for us is that we are so love and treasure the Lord Jesus that we have hold him of such infinite value that it will be displayed as the Lord Jesus said in our love for one another love will be the primary thing that people experience when they gather in such a way that even those who are fundamentally opposed to my theological convictions will be able to sit in church and say

[ 31 : 58 ] I disagree with that guy I disagree with he's narrow minded but I want to be part of this community because I feel more loved here than I do with the liberal church that agrees with my position that's my vision for St.

Paul's and so I got to work on my treasure my vision is that we will be welcome while at the same time not affirming of all cultural distinctives and this is an issue for the whole church to address if our current 1115 congregation is only Chinese I want to know why they're not reaching Syrians and Japanese we want to look at the data and see what God has for us next what new barriers we need to break down what listening ear what things we need to learn and know what we need to change what groups we need to start praying for what things need to be resourced Chatswood is our mission field it's a place where God has called us for his purpose to reach it with the gospel in such a way that people from all nations gather around his throne and we get an expression of it in this place the vision of unity in diversity is for every congregation it's for every small group one of the great demonstrations of the

Christian gospel is people coming together all people black white rich poor male female cool uncool all coming together because the good news of the Lord Jesus and so my vision for us as a church is to be a trans-cultural church this is different than a multicultural church a trans-cultural church you see to me multicultural still implies an element of individualism and it still implies that the thing that is distinctive about me is my individual culture it says to me that our individual cultural identifications should in fact be the significant marker in how we view ourselves in how we view each other in the way that we relate to each other as a church it says to me that our individual culture is one of the significant ordering principles of our life together it means to have equality you've got your culture I've got my culture and we need to equally honor them that's what multicultural that's how it's worked out in

Chatswood it means including all aspects of all cultures in such a way that we don't critique we don't seek to transform any culture we just take it on holus bolus and it means that every culture has every right next thing you know 365 days a year we're celebrating someone's culture in some particular kind of way there's no room at all for me to preach or anything else in a multicultural church there's always a danger that we'll be tussling to evaluate one culture over another in order that one cultural group will have supremacy over another and in that environment the majority culture will set the tone they will set the flavor they will set the agenda they will have the prominence as they have at St.

Paul's for decades it will always happen because our individual culture whatever it is is the unifying principle for us and what must be honored and it must be respected above all and what I'm calling to is something different a trans cultural church is a community that reflects it embraces and enjoys the diversity of its mission context but by the power of the gospel it transcends transcends its cultural context and it creates one new community in Christ that's a trans cultural church this vision this church is not about obliterating cultural diversity and distinction you see you know when Jesus broke down the barriers between people he didn't obliterate the differences he didn't say well you Jews are now Gentiles and you Gentiles are now Jews or we'll have a new thing we'll have a

[ 36 : 26 ] Jew the Jews were still Jews the Greeks were still Greeks the slaves were still slaves the free were still free the men were still the men and the women were still the women the Bible affirms culture the Bible affirms cultural diversity diversity of culture is arguably part of God's nature in order for all of humanity the picture of the end of time is people worshipping Jesus still I believe in Revelation 5 and other bits of the Revelation still in their cultural diversity I don't think we're all going to walk in there and all going to look like me praise God I don't think that's what's going to happen and I don't think we're all going to speak English I don't think Jesus is doing ESL languages right now I don't think that's what's going to happen and I'm absolutely confident we're all going to be Anglican the Bible also causes to a cultural sensitivity in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 10 11 we understand and we communicate the good news of the Jesus culturally the word culture is not mentioned however in the whole Bible but the Bible is deeply concerned about our human identity and interaction our vision is to embrace the diversity as part of

God's creativity but transcend the diversity and find a common ground not in our cultures not in our cultures but in the Lord Jesus crucially the Bible's reflection on human identity interaction stands outside of culture itself it says all of humanity are fallen they're all sinful beings who have been made in God's image and yet redeemed and transformed by the one Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit into a new humanity under the Lordship of Jesus that is this is and I believe will be true for everyone irrespective of your culture and so what the Bible does is actually marginalizes culture particularity there is very little interest in cultural practices in the Bible they are either ignored or they are pushed to the edges in the New Testament our identity in Jesus supersedes all other cultural identifications and this is the vision that I have for us we don't try to find common ground in our respective cultures we transcend them in order to find

Jesus a number of years ago in the transition from me being a country lad to getting used to the city I said yes to go to the orchestra and never been to one before and it was sold to me as a concert and so I went along to this thing with Nat thinking okay I better take something to read and I remember sitting there and we had a good spot in terms of seeing where it was going first time I've ever been to one of these events and I remember sitting there in advance when they're all practicing and people are banging on stuff and making a racket you know it was squeezing this and whack whack whack some blokes over there and I'm thinking oh this is going to be great yeah bring it on and yet I remember sitting there being mesmerized as they they started to play the conductor comes out and the conductor gets them all to do their bit at the right time and it was incredible the musical harmony that

I saw with that orchestra and what I thought was interesting one guy stood at the back with this huge bell donger thing I've got a seat this guy standing there for what an hour or something I don't know how long it went for you know it doesn't matter it seemed longer he's standing there and I'm I'm watching him because I'm thinking this is the most interesting bit for me when he when he wails on that thing that's going to be great and he didn't do it until right at the end boom and I'm like yes that's all he did that's how he earned his money that guy that night he stood there the whole night and yet he played part in something that was magnificent he played part of something that was magnificent didn't draw the attention to himself at the end of the night at the end of the night none of the musicians stood the conductor did the conductor stood it all reflected him that's the vision I have for us as a church it's all about Jesus he's the one who unites us takes all of our distinctions and differences and brings them together in a beautiful harmony that the United Nations cannot achieve Amen