

Good Morning

Today, we're calling vision Sunday.

This morning and this evening I want to preach on the same theme – different texts, different sermons – but the same theme
I want to talk about Partnership in the Gospel.

This morning I want to look at the opening verses of Philippians chapter 1, p1178.
And I want to talk about what it means
to be in Partnership Together
to be in Partnership for the Gospel; and
to be Partnership to Make a Difference

To be in Partnership Together, for the Gospel, to Make a Difference

1. We are Partners Together

Paul says in Philippians chapter 1v1

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons

Paul is the person called by God to plant congregations in Asia Minor and Greece.
He was the overall leader of those congregations.
Timothy was his young, highly able co-worker.
They gave up their careers, they were set apart, they desired more than anything to see people become whole-hearted disciples of Jesus Christ for the glory of God
This is what they had given their lives to: to serve Christ and his people.

They were at the sharp end of the Gospel.
Talking with non-believers, preaching the gospel, planting congregations, helping those congregations flourish.

Who are the “Pauls and Timothys” for us today?

Well you have called 4 people: Me, Jeremy Bamber, David Garratt, and Chris Steynor.

We have laid aside our careers, we have been set apart by you, we desire more than anything else to see people become whole-hearted disciples of Jesus Christ for the glory of God
You have set apart 4 of us.
I want to talk about just 2.

7 years ago we called Chris Steynor to be our Youth Minister.

We had never done anything like this before.

We recognised that our Youth Work need to be stronger,

We probably had a dozen young people, but very few came to church –

who could blame them, the way we did church was a million miles from their own cultural experience.

So we had a Day, much like today, where we pledged with our cheque-books to make a difference.

We believed in Mission

We believed that Young People needed to hear the gospel

We believed WE needed to do something about it.

We hired Chris Steynor, 7 years later

Our Friday Night Youth Event regularly attracts over 60 young people

Our Evening Service has grown from 30 to 100 with about 1/3 being under the age of 25
We have a full schools programme, small groups and Alphas for young people.
many have made a profession on Faith, many have been baptised
Not only do we now have a thriving Youth Work but we also have an embryonic 20s ministry.
Thanks to God, thanks to Chris, thanks to you.

7 Years ago we housed our first Stipendiary Curate.

His name was Woody – *Now there was someone who blew stereotypes!*
and then came David.

David isn't here so I can afford to embarrass him!

David is lovely (*He can't manage his way out of a paper bag but he's lovely*)

He has a gentle Pastoral heart.

He heads up our Pastoral Network – every Tuesday, the Pastoral leadership of the church gathers, that's: me, Jeremy, David, Chris, Janette Watkins and Judy Yeomans to pray for those who are ill and David arranges for the church to visit them

He preaches with a wonderful style, with great illustrations, and an honesty and vulnerability that is incredibly attractive.

They (with me and Jeremy) are your "Pauls and Timothys" of verse 1.

To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons

If we are the "Pauls and Timothys" then You are the Saints ☺

Now, some of you may be thinking,

"Well, aren't all saints dead? – *what are you trying to say!*

Well, if you were raised Catholic, you're right, all saints are dead.

But when the Bible uses the word "saint" it just means somebody who loves Jesus, it means someone who has been forgiven (or sanctified).

Saint. Sanctified – same word.

It means someone who loves God.

So here's a guy named Bill, he's a plumber, and he loves Jesus.

So he's Saint Bill

Here's Linda she's a teacher, she loves Jesus.

So she's saint Linda.

God is addressing this letter to all the saints (every one of them, everyone who loves Jesus),

Saint Bill, Saint Brian / Saint Mary, Saint Margret / Saint Zehariah and Saint Xena),

to everyone, including those in spiritual and practical leadership,

Steve and Jeremy and David and Chris, servants of Jesus Christ

To all the Saints at Southover (that's you), together with all its leaders

v2 I thank God every time I remember you.

In all my prayers for all of you,

I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

Partnership.

The leadership didn't say – stand aside we don't need you, we're the professionals, just sit back and watch.
The church didn't say – that's right it's up to you, you must grow the church, you must visit the sick, you must do everything.

- They were partners.

They had different gifts, different callings, different circumstances for sure –
but they worked together.

- They were partners.

They were equal in Christ, they had the same mission, they had the same priorities, they had the same commitment.

- They were partners.

You and me,

We are partners.

I must not say to you “stand aside I don’t need you, I make the decisions, I’m the professional, I’m different because I’ve got a collar” - because that’s wrong

You must not say to me “that’s right it’s up to you, you must grow the church, you must visit the sick, you must do mission!” - because that’s wrong too

We are partners

And I thank my God every time I remember you in my prayers (which is every day)

for I pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day I came (7 ½ years ago) until now.

We are partners – and this is pretty wonderful church to be in partnership with.

2. Secondly, We are Partners in the Gospel.

v4, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel

The Gospel is our mission

The Good News of Jesus:

to preach good news to the poor,

to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind,

to release the oppressed.

This, is what we are all about!

The church is a boat – that’s why this part is called a Nave – it means boat.

This church is a boat – a life-boat

and life-boats are in business of saving souls from the chaos of sea and the darkness of death

We are in the business of saving souls from the chaos of life, the grip of death and the darkness of hell.

This is our job.

Our gospel is that it need not be this way for people,

in Jesus is life and hope and meaning.

And this message is our mission (your mission, my mission), and no other priority comes close.

If we are a Christian then this is to be our passion.

To see God glorified, to see souls saved, to see the kingdom of God come in other’s lives

and to take our pleasure from God’s pleasure at lives turned around

This is our mission – if you are part of this church

This is your mission too

We are partners for the Gospel.

And as partners we stand today, together at a cross-roads in our church's ministry.

Just as a life-boat crew get on-board knowing full-well that they may be called to sacrifice themselves to save others...

So I am asking every one, who loves Jesus in this church, to sacrifice themselves that we may do the same.

Today, this day we decide to go forwards or backwards,

we decide whether to grow or shrink,

we decide to man-the-boats or let people drown.

David Garratt is coming to the end of his curacy with us,

He has to decide now where he should go.

Up to now his costs have been met mainly by the Diocese.

His and Helen's ministry is hugely valuable and they have been part of some of the most exciting growth in our church.

They are key players, and

The PCC would like them to stay,

they would like to stay,

and I know many, many of you would like to them to stay too

– but if that is to happen we will need to pay for David.

Chris has been our Youth Minister now for over 6 years,

he is at the point where he should **either** move on, or be given new responsibilities.

Chris has **outstanding** gifts beyond delivering great youth work.

He is shaping up to be the best preacher we've got (if you haven't heard him you need to),

he is an outstanding musician and has skills in modern modes of communication.

We need **these** gifts - His and Ali's ministry is crucial.

The PCC would like them to stay and take on these new roles,

they would like to stay,

many, many of you would like to them to stay –

but if that is to happen we will need to pay for his replacement.

The vision of the church is to strengthen every area of our church's life –

from the quality and variety of music in our services,

to new social and care groups for all ages,

to developing our new congregation

to opening a town-centre, town-wide ministry through CaféLife

Our desire is to reach out to the whole town – with Parenting Courses, Marriage Courses, Bereavement Courses and Alpha Courses.

Just this week we gained permission from the other Anglican Ministers to be able to do this.

The reality is that the other Anglican leaders recognise that their own churches cannot do this sort of outreach, so they have agreed, with Bishop Wallace, that we can.

People are drowning all over this town, we can help them.

We can't do this if we lose David & Helen and Chris & Ali.

If we lose them our ministry shrinks.

let me be clear: Jeremy and I will not be able to cover what needs to be done.

If we lose them we go backwards.

We stand at the cross roads of a new opportunity
Will you, with me, make the sacrifice?

In our Diocese, in the last 6 years, adult church membership has shrunk by 3,000 people (that's 10%), children's attendance has shrunk by 1,000 (that's **25%**).

This can't continue.

We have to step up to the challenge.

We stand at the cross roads.

Will you, with me, make the sacrifice?

We are in partnership together,
We are in partnership for the gospel

3. We are in Partnership to make a Difference.

v6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

When Churchill asked America for assistance against the Nazis in 1941, he pleaded, 'Give us the tools and we will finish the job'.

'Give us the tools and we will finish the job'.

God has done some great things among us – but the work is not finished.

In the last 7 years our ministry has grown

among many other things,

our Youth Work has flourished

Southover Counselling thrives

The Chapter House has been built

Our crèche has gone from 1 to sometimes more than a dozen

Mission Rwanda is making a real difference

our evening service has grown from 30 to 100,

our Morning Service from 140 to 180.

This growth represents souls saved, lives changed and people living for God.

But the job is not finished...

In all these instances our growth has been preceded by prayer, by vision and by sacrificial giving.

To take the next step we need to find an additional £64,000 to our regular giving.

To keep David & Helen, to give Chris a new role and find his replacement

To grow the new congregations, to reach out to all of Lewes, to strengthen what we have

we need to find an additional £64,000 to our regular giving.

This is a big ask. But it is by no-means Un-do-able.

In the Old Testament a Jew would give in two ways:

by the tithe, a tenth of his income (which was considered compulsory), and

by giving on top of that, thank offerings (which were considered voluntary).

It would not be unusual for a Jew to give, BEFORE paying taxes, an additional 15% of his income to God.

There are no rules about how much Christians should give

But right back in Genesis (4,000 years ago)

Jacob the swindler said to God “I shall give to you a tenth of everything that I have”,
Zacchaeus the tax collector gave away half his possessions; and
The unnamed widow in Mark 12 gave 'everything she had to live on'.

There are no rules on how much we should give, but it strikes me that if
4000 years ago, a bronze aged people, who had “no hot and cold running water, no social services,
no TVs, DVDs or CDs, no health care, carpets or comforts.
No anything (that we would call **essential**),
if this backward, unsophisticated, uneducated people could adopt one of the most sophisticated, generous
and progressive principles on charitable giving. Then we can too
make no mistake we are fabulously wealthy by their standards.

God said, before you spend any money on yourself, before you pay taxes to the King,
before you spend money on food and shelter bring me the first tithe.

WHY?.

because

3.1 Firstly, our giving shapes our Passion.

To give to God’s work FIRST, and to give SACRIFICIALLY, is just about the best way of shaping our
passions, for Jesus said ‘where your treasure is there your heart will be also’

To give, first shapes our dreams for our hearts follow where our treasure is.

The warmth of our hearts prompt us to give, our giving warms our heart.

If you want to be passionate for God – then give...

*I became a Christian when I was a teenager and my Father taught me to give 10% of my pocket money to
the building of God’s kingdom.*

I carried on doing this when I was a Saturday boy at M&S,

when I was a student at University,

*when Amanda and I bought our first home (easily the toughest financial years of our life), and
when the years of abundance came when I worked in the city.*

We do it today.

*I tell you this ‘we have never wanted for anything’, We have never missed the finances,
God has blessed us more than all that money could ever have bought.*

May I urge you to tithe to God’s Kingdom,

to teach your children to tithe, they will learn more about life and the value of money and the importance of
others than any other practical lesson you can give them.

*J.D. Rockefeller said, "I never would have been able to give away my first million to the kingdom of God had
I not learnt to tithe my first salary of \$1.50."*

Our giving shapes our Passions,

3.2 It shapes our Faith.

In 2 Corinthians 9 Paul talks about giving – he says

*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also
reap generously’.*

As we give our faith increases because we experience the generosity of God to us.

In Malachi 3v10, God says

“Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out blessing upon you”

He says "go on, put me first".

Test me in this.

Have a go. Try me, See if its true.

See if your being faithful to me with your money doesn't result in blessings more than you can number.

Will I not give you:

a sense of fulfilment more than money can buy?

a security that is safer than any health plan?

a belonging that is more impressive than any 1,2,3 or 4 bed-roomed house,

a purpose that is stronger than any high flying career.

test me in this!

I believe God!

Jesus said "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

I believe God!

I believe God has never short changed anyone.

If you would be obedient, if you would see your faith grow, if you have your passions change - give.

It shapes our passions

It shapes our faith, finally

3.3 It shapes other people's lives.

The statistics show that only half our membership (counting husbands and wives together), only half our membership currently pledge to give regularly to the ministry at Southover. Only half

That was both a shock to me because I had assumed that almost ALL of us would be giving something regularly.

But it was also an encouragement because it means that half of us are **still** to give!! And that's brilliant!

What would happen if we **all** gave,

What would happen if we **all** took the challenge to tithe, (accepting that some people cannot for all sorts of valid reasons)

If we did £64,000 would be like a drop in the Ocean!

Our ministry at Southover would explode.

People would be saved.

You would become the most powerful force for good in the whole of Lewes.

Why? Because we will have, as a church, determined

to have our passion fixed on God's Glory

to have our faith grow

to make a difference in peoples lives.

We stand at the cross-roads of an exciting new stage of our church's life.

I am so grateful to the many that are already giving sacrificially through time and finances

But now I am asking us ALL... all members, all people who want to love God

to be in partnership, for the gospel, to make a difference in people's lives.

There are letters for all of us.

Everyone who is already a member of this church has one addressed to them,

Anyone who would like to be part of the vision of this church, please take one.

Would you return the Response Form by the 21st November, to either Janette Watkins (our Treasurer) or to the box at the back of church.

May God bless us, as we step out in faith, in the adventure called: Southover Church!