

Dear Friends

I suppose that vision is a mysterious blend of hope and expectation, probably with a big dose of hindsight thrown in. I have always understood that it is vital to have a vision for the future because it is these aspirations, that we carry in our hearts, which pull us forward. The writer of Proverbs expresses this when he says “without a vision the people perish” (Proverbs 29 vs 18). A vision is something for a community to gather around and to plan for, once everyone has been heard and vision agreed we move forward, actions united with goals we have set firmly in our minds.

It is easy though to get confused about vision. The most common mistake is to confuse it with mission. A vision is a snapshot of where you would like to be, say in five or ten years time. Mission is the steps we take as we move towards our targets. As we move forward, with each step we take we have to ask how the tasks we do now will help achieve our vision. This may be because some of our targets are met or, because with new insight, something might need to be clarified. However, our vision essentially will remain the same. Mission on the other hand might involve many different things according to the nature and characteristics of the people involved. Always though with one proviso, that the overall aim of seeking to implement our vision, is the primary motivation for what we do. Failure to hold this principle central often causes delays, frustrations and a growing confusion about what the vision is.

Of course my own vision perspective is one that seeks to be true to the Bible. I hope you all would expect this to be the case. Indeed the thrust of the verse I have just quoted is more about the revelation of God’s will through the prophets than about what our personal goals might be. It has been one of my essential beliefs that God has a plan for our lives and the more we are switched onto that the better. It follows that unless we surrender who we are to God, we will not understand what this vision for our lives is, or be able to let it be worked out in our lives.

When I came to this area I had a very simple vision and that was to see our churches grow strong in the love of the God we serve and to bring others into this relationship of love. This vision included calling everyone to worship this God of love and encourage everyone on the journey of knowing the God we worship. This, I understood would mean helping some to get to know who this God is, as well as encouraging those who already did know him to draw deeper into the relationship of love, so that our God became more and more real to them.

Another part of this was highly personal, in the sense I have always believed that I have to live my vision. I have never wanted people to listen to my preaching and teaching only. If that were not accompanied by me trying to be an example of what I was saying, then why should they. How good an example and how much I have succeeded in this is clearly open for comment. Many will take a view for good or ill, but the supreme judgement is a heavenly one. The key for me is of course to take account of any criticism and to learn from it, but I know that the one to whom I have to fully justify myself is seated in heavenly places. I am also aware that someone like me is subject to a more searching assessment. “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers; because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” (James 3 vs 1). Clearly anyone who wishes to teach the words of God needs to show that they have understood the teaching and seek to live it out. Consequently, I have always tried to be aware of this and I have often got it wrong. There are however particular times when a new assessment is due and I believe I have come to that sort of time now.

On Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April at the Hallow Annual Parochial Meeting I made the following announcement.

“On the evening of 30<sup>th</sup> September 1996 I promised to serve you and our God to the best of my ability. Now nearly 22 years later, to quote the words of another, “I believe I have given all that I have and all that I am” in seeking to achieve that. It should also be said that in that time I have been accompanied by Emma, in like manner.

During this time, I have made it known that I would hold this vocation always before Father God in order that we would know that this was still His will and purpose. Over recent years this truth has been tested against what I believe God’s will for us might be. We now believe that God is calling us to retire from stipendiary ministry.

I have already notified the Diocese of our intention and we have secured a rental property in Kenilworth through the Church of England Pension Board. I will be writing to the Bishop at the end of the Summer to formally notify him of our decision to retire. Our last service in the Benefice will be on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October, when I hope all congregations will join us at Hallow in order to celebrate our ministry here.

Now is not the time to elaborate further but over the coming months there will be opportunities for us to share more.”

I am sorry that it was not possible to share this with the other churches in the Benefice at the same time but the practicalities prohibited it. However, I have since last July believed that I was being called to a new vision which required me to be obedient to a new calling from God. This calling has been growing in me for some time, I may even have tried to put it off, but I can do that no longer. It therefore means that the people of Hallow, Grimley and Holt (and almost certainly Lower Broadheath) will need to look to someone else to mark out a vision to which you feel called to by our God.

Of course there is still a little way to go before the formal goodbyes and I hope to remain faithful to my vision principles in that time. However, Emma and myself have already entered into the process of releasing and letting go. We pray that God’s grace will abound as that process continues so that we can leave well with many happy memories.

May the Lord richly bless you.

Robert

PS It now looks like our final Sunday will be 4<sup>th</sup> November. However once final details are sorted out we will confirm this.