

# Vision Sunday 2019

## Up In Out

### Introduction – what future for us?

On the global stage at present we are witnessing unprecedented contests between world leaders for the prize of predicting what the world will be like in the near future...

- On the one hand, **conservative autocratic world leaders**, like Pres. Trump just last week, want to see a world full of patriots, not globalists.
- But some, like the **Sec Gen of the UN**, Antonio Guterres, this week, envision a future world governance divided by two super-powers: China and America – a new cold war.
- And, then of course, there's a very different vision of the future being campaigned for by millions in major cities around the globe by **climate-strikers** – their vision of the future is a world without rising sea levels, devastated forests, disappearing species and life-threatening climactic conditions.
- On a more trivial note, yesterday's AFL grand final was won on the back of a bold vision of the future - in 2010 Brendon Gale and Peggy O'Neal (CEO and Pres. of **Richmond FC**) set forth a bold prediction that the Tigers would double their membership, play in 3 finals campaigns and win a premiership in **just 5 years**. It took them 7 years to do it; and now in just 9 years they have 100K members and 2 flags.



**Visions of the future** are all around us in politics, sport and business, but what of the future for the Church?

On the global stage, a quick survey of media reports would have us characterizing the institutional and formal denominational churches with words like declining, disgraced, divided, marginalized, fading.

I often feel this way about the **big picture** of Church and its future; the institutional and organized churches. Yet, if you ask me what's the future of small **local gatherings of Christians that engage in loving action and service** in their own communities – I have a great sense of hope and vision for these.

It makes sense to me that many churches are returning to the manner in which Jesus of Nazareth started the movement that we call Church. Given our context now, it is perhaps more than ever relevant to envision the future of Christian mission and ministry as small, but significant. Let me explain...

## Jesus' vision for the Church

Sometimes we miss a most significant factor in Jesus' great commission as recorded in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28..

“<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19,20

It's easy to be distracted in this passage by the **extraordinary scope** of the vision (into all the world). But we may miss the fact that this vision was cast before a **tiny band of followers**. The scope was huge; but the **means was minute!** In his book, *The Forgotten Ways*, Alan Hirsch writes:

“Ever since the mission and ministry of Jesus, God has never stopped calling for a movement of "Little Jesuses" to follow him into the world... Given the situation of the Church in the West, much will now depend on whether we are willing to break out of a stifling herd instinct and find God again in the context of the advancing God's Kingdom.”

There is perhaps no better time than now to see the future of churches as a **collective of small bands**; small communities sharing love and hope, rather than big institutions preserving traditions, making moral decrees and pontificating about politics in high places.

When it comes to the hope we share, even the **core tenets** believed by disciples today could do with some simplifying and clarifying. It's not too heretical to sum up Jesus' teaching to his disciples around these 4 axes...

- Love God
- Love one another (and people will then know you are disciples of Jesus)
- Love other (just as you love yourselves)
- Help others to become followers of Jesus too.

Of course, we need not ignore the more complex and sophisticated teachings of Christian scholars, but if we were to strip back the layers and quieten the noise, we might just **make more sense to the people living around us who wonder what Christians are really on about.**

What it looks like to be a “disciple” and what it means to “make” disciples in different nations and communities may differ as it has in times and places past. It is wise to listen to the communities in which we are placed to serve and consider how best to make the love of God known in a way best suited to the context we are given.

Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, in their book *The Intangible Kingdom*, asked a question to a man on the street...

“If Christianity was only about finding a group of people to live life with who shared openly their search for God and allowed anyone regardless of behaviour to seek too and who collectively lived by faith to make the world a little more like Heaven would you be interested?”

‘Hell yeah ’ was the reply. The person surveyed then asked, ‘Are there churches like that?’”

That last question is one we often hear during the week in conversation with locals on our church site who visit for various activities – “Are their churches like that? Is yours like that?”

### Jesus’ method of making disciples

Jesus **gathered a small group around him** to commission them as the foundation of many similar bands of people who share the liberating and life-giving mercy and love of God in the world. But what was his method of making disciples?

In Mark chapter 3 we see the original terms and conditions of being a follower who is sent (an apostle)...

“And (Jesus) appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out...” Mark 3:14

The late Dallas Willard, a prolific writer on matters of discipleship, defined it this way... discipleship is “learning from Jesus how to live like Jesus.”

By being with Jesus, those first followers learned from Jesus how to think, act, to exercise faith and to live with a new vision of God and of life. They were invited to **imitate him**, in this sense, and then called to invite others to **imitate them** as followers.

While the context is different, it is hard to argue away the point that the **practice can be similar today**, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

### Up In Out – 3 dimensions of church

Mike Breen, author of *Building a Discipling Culture* and founder of 3DMPublishing<sup>1</sup> offers a simple and helpful diagnostic tool to help churches think simply and clearly about the vision of the church they wish to be in the future.

There are **three key dimensions** we witness in the Gospels of Jesus’ own life and mission and these become, for the church, guiding ideals for a church’s health and effectiveness.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.3dmpublishing.com/mike-breen>

### Dimension 1: **Up**

Jesus demonstrated time and time again what it meant to exercise faith in and have a spiritual relationship His Heavenly Father. Many times, we read about Jesus praying – meditating on God’s Word, listening in quiet places, speaking in fervent prayer and praise. He had **his own personal methods of engagement with God the Father**, but also took part in informal gatherings in households, **and in formal gatherings** in synagogues and the temple. In *The Book of Acts* we then read how the apostles and followers in the early church doing the same things as regular practices.

### Dimension 2: **In**

Jesus spent time very intentionally with his small group. He invested in a limited number of people in order that they would have a greater understanding and impact and he showed them a model for sharing hope with others. He let them in and took them with him. They knew one another, served one another, and loved one another. They **did life together** and **served one another** in a small and committed community. We see that this kind of reproduction of disciples of Jesus by imitation is later implied, sometimes explicit, in the teaching of the Apostle Paul.

### Dimension 3: **Out**

Jesus also met needs he saw in the world around him as he went out to spread His good news about God. He **served others** with the God’s love, grace, and power. The Gospels show him taking his disciples with him as he did so and even commissioning them to do the same. He healed the sick, touched the unclean and outcast, fed the hungry, and opened blind eyes and deaf ears. He envisioned a new world, inviting people to turn from their old ways toward a new life promised by God to all who trust him. In *The book of Acts* the followers of Jesus are often depicted as doing things Jesus had been doing. They learned from Jesus how to reach out and serve others, even complete strangers beyond their communities, in God’s name. And they passed it on.

**Up-In-and-Out** was the way Jesus lived with his disciples and as followers of Jesus, so it’s fitting for us to look to the future of our church through these three lenses – Up, In, Out, and evaluate our own practices and plan ahead to be more true to our purpose and more fruitful in our life together.

### [Questions for Conversation and Feedback](#)

Take time personally and in conversation with other members of the church to consider these questions with the Up – In – Out dimensions of discipleship in mind. If you have any feedback to give the leaders of your church, write it down and offer your picture of the future of your church community...

1) Most followers of Jesus feel more suited to one or two of the dimensions of the triangle, rather than at all three. What about you? Where are your strength areas? Why do you think that is?

2) What about our church? What evidence do you see of healthy and effective life-signs in each of the three dimensions - Up, In, and Out? Where are we strong? Where is there room for improvement?

3) What suggestions do you have for strengthening our church's life and health in any of the three dimensions, Up – In – Out?

## Conclusion

Alan Hirsch sums up a challenging conclusion about being the church today:

“In a very real and sobering way, we must actually become the gospel to the people around us—an expression of the real Jesus through the quality of our life together.”