

**Title: Greater - Vision Sunday 2013**  
**Text: Acts 2**  
**Preacher: Stu Cameron**  
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This is Newlife:

Newlife Uniting is an Acts 2 church  
with an Acts 1:8 mandate  
and a Matthew 28 commission.

We are an Act2 2 church: Our story began almost 2000 years ago when the Holy Spirit came like a rushing wind and fire and a transformed frightened and bewildered disciples into a revolutionary movement.

We have an Acts 1:8 mandate: In the power of the Holy Spirit we bear witness to the Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the very ends of the earth.

We have a Matthew 28 commission: Jesus himself has charged us to make disciples of the nations – baptizing and teaching wherever we go.

It is in this identity, with this mandate and charged with this commission that I believe that in 2013 God is calling us to Greater encounters with him that lead to a greater harvest for Him that gives greater glory to Him.

### **In 2013 God is calling us into Greater encounters with God**

Two weeks ago our family sailed from Brisbane harbor on a one-week cruise of the South Pacific. Everything was smooth sailing until we got into the open sea. There we struck gale force winds and 6-8 meter waves that lasted for most of the next two days – all thanks to Tropical Cyclone Oswald. It was like riding a roller coaster for two days. It was wet and wild!

Cyclones originate in this mysterious place called the Intertropical Convergence Zone near the equator where winds from the northern and southern hemispheres converge and sometimes generate destructive storms. But here is the other interesting phenomena that only happens in the Intertropical Convergence Zone – the same winds from the northern and southern hemisphere that sometimes generate destructive storms will sometimes instead converge and effectively cancel each other out so that there is not a breath of wind at all. Thousands of square kilometers of sea will be glassy calm with not a ripple of wind on them.

For centuries sailors have had a term for this wind-less condition; the doldrums. Before steam engines, sailors fared nothing more than being stuck in the doldrums with no wind in their sails, drifting dangerously wherever the current might take them. The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner gave voice to this fear:

*Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, no breath no motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean.*

The dictionary definition of the doldrums is this:

Doldrums: (noun)

1. A state of inactivity or stagnation.
2. A dull, listless, depressed mood. Low spirits.

Some of us are stuck in the spiritual doldrums. Some of us are experiencing an ongoing state of little spiritual activity or stagnation. Some of us are right now feeling spiritually listless. Some of us have not felt the wind in our sails for a long time, if at all. Some of us are spiritually stuck; as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean.

Here's the thing; I passionately believe that in 2013 many of us are going to experience the wind of God's Holy Spirit in our sails like never before. In 2013 God is calling us into greater encounters with His power.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came fell on the disciples with such ferocious power it sounded like cyclonic wind:

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 2:2-4)

Before God can do a great thing through us he must do a great thing in us.

In 2013 God is calling us into, and offering us greater encounters with him as the rushing wind of the Holy Spirit fills our sails and blows us out of any and all doldrums.

What happened on the Day of Pentecost was a move of God, pure and simple. But it was a move of God that the disciples participated in for the simple reason they had stayed in Jerusalem and waited as Jesus had commanded them to:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

(Acts 2:1)

With their patient obedience, by their active waiting, the disciples placed themselves in an environment where God could do what only God could do; move in Power. In 2013 we want to provide you with as many environments as possible where you can experience greater encounters with God.

Weekend worship is one such environment. When two or three gather in his name, Jesus says he is present. If like me you want to live more fully in God's presence in 2013 then spend more time worshipping him with others.

Small groups are another environment where we experience greater encounters with God. It was in homes, not in church buildings where the miracles of the Acts 2 church occurred. In 2013 some of us need to stop making excuses, take responsibility for our spiritual life and start building relationships with others.

A new ministry we are beginning in 2013 which was announced earlier is Prayer and Worship nights. At least four times this year we are going to gather mid week as a church to simply worship, pray and seek after God. While these nights will be structured, we are deliberately leaving as much space as we can for God to move and speak in whatever ways God chooses. On Wednesday night when we gather for our first prayer and worship night we can do so with eager expectation, based simply on this promise from James:

Come near to God and he will come near to you.

(James 4:8)

As I was preparing this message God gave me a picture for some of you. Have you ever come back from a holiday to a home that has been shut up tight for some weeks? When you open the door you can smell musty staleness. Some of us have that spiritual aroma about us; musty staleness. But for whatever reason –fear, laziness, stubbornness, pride - we have kept the windows of our lives closed and the doors bolted to God. If that's you, in 2013 its time to unbolt the doors and fling them wide open and slide up the windows and allow the refreshing breeze of the Spirit of God to renew you.

In 2013 God is calling is into greater encounters with Him.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the early church grew rapidly. Right at the end of Acts 2 we read this:

The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

(Acts 2:47)

God is calling us into greater Holy Spirit encounters with Him that lead to a...

## Greater harvest for Him

This is the USS United States. It was built by the US Navy in 1952 and cost \$78million. It was designed as a troop carrier to carry up to 15,000 soldiers anywhere in the world. The USS United States was fast; its actual top speed was a Cold War secret, as was its propeller design, but it could travel almost 80kmh. On its maiden voyage this remarkable ship smashed the transatlantic crossing record, and to this day more than sixty years later, still holds the west bound record.

The USS United States sailed continuously from 1952 to 1969. But here is the thing; not once in those 17 years of sailing did it do what it was designed to do – carry troops into battle. For 17 years it operated as a luxury cruise liner, not carrying 15,000 troops into war, but hundreds of high paying guests to exotic locations around the world. A ship purposely built for war became a playground for the rich and self-indulgent.

The tragedy of too many churches is that they do not engage in the purpose for which they were formed; engage in the mission of God in the world.

Too often churches operate like luxury liners rather than battle-hardened war ships.

The church is a war-ship, carrying armour-bearing followers of Jesus into battle so they can order to take up the fight against the enemies of God.

The church is a rescue boat, who with the message of Christ crucified and risen, seeks to save those who are facing a Christ-less eternity in hell.

The church is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The church of God does not have a mission; the mission of God has a church.

Newlife is an Acts 2 church with an Acts 1:8 mandate and a Matthew 28 commission. Our vision is in our name – Newlife. Before anything else we exist to see spiritually dead people discover new life in Christ.

Like the first church in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit is given to us not so we can gather in a holy huddle, but so that we can be sent and scattered and infect the world with the love of God.

In 2013 God is calling us into deeper encounters with him that lead to a greater harvest for him.

More than any other statistic I rejoice in the fact that last year 70 people discovered new life in Christ in our midst. Will you join me in believing for a greater harvest this year? If what has happened already is any indication, you should!

Two weeks ago Melissa preached on surrender. Many people responded when given the opportunity, including 14 first time commitments. Hallelujah!

Two weeks ago a young man was invited by a friend to 12two. He hadn't been in church for a long time and he found the first 15 minutes of the service weird. But God spoke to him as the service progressed. Last week he came again and this time he was gripped by the love of God, but was worried that God could never forgive him for his past. Mike spoke with him about grace, prayed with him as he trusted his life to God. Now he wants to tell everyone how great God is. That was last Sunday night.

Over the last year God has done some amazing things at Pac Pines. Kylie started coming last November after her mum, who lives interstate, found Newlife through our webpage and encouraged Kylie to come one week. Let me read Kylie's own words:

I grew up in a Christian family, attending church, Sunday school and later youth group. But circumstances as a child left me feeling deserted by God. I had not been to church in around 25 years before walking through the doors of, not a church but a basketball court.

The first sermon that I heard that day was on the lost sheep. When I told my mother she laughed and said that she and family members have been praying for me for many years.

So I continued to come and listen to Orrell speak. His means of communication is such that it reaches me and I understand what he is saying to me.

I spoke to my mum on the 3rd of January and told her I was thinking about becoming a Christian.

I went to bed that night but I was woken by a bright white light on the ceiling of my home. It had rays extended out of it - much like how you see a picture of a sun drawn. I initially felt fear but almost immediately felt an immense sense of calm. The light descended from the ceiling and entered the centre of my body with the rays spreading throughout my body. It was a feeling of warmth and extremely calming. I fell back asleep.

I dreamt of Jesus. He sat on a rock in a field of yellow flowers. And I sat there at his feet, not as a grown woman but as a child. We didn't speak. We just sat with me picking flowers. I felt love, peace and a strong feeling of safety.

I told my friend the next day of my experience and the dream. He has known me since I was 5 years old and was actually the minister of the church I attended as a little girl. He'd told me this was a vision - a visit from the Holy Spirit.

It was a sign I could not ignore. God had spoken to me in a pretty big way. I became a Christian on the 9th of January.

I have suffered depression and anxiety for a very long time and this past month I have been reading my bible and praying daily. I've pretty much handed my life over to God, trusting his plan for me that he will keep me safe. I know that at times I will face hard times but with God by my side I will be able to turn to him for help and guidance.

My story is testimony to God's never ending, unconditional love for us".

Man, I love that story. I long to hear more stories like that - God wants to write more stories like that in our midst.

God is calling us into greater encounters with him that lead to a greater harvest for him. Here are four ways this will happen in 2013:

### **Time to Build**

Next door is a gutted church. It's pretty confronting. It's painful. But it all has a purpose; to make space for those to come.

Those who are to come are represented by this empty chair. And this is actually one of the new chairs that will be in our new worship space. We have ordered a thousand just like it. You can test this one out after the service if you like!

Empty chairs here and at Pac Pines will be filled as with the wind of the Spirit in our sails, we invite people to come and hear the gospel.

Every chair represents a name. Every name has a story. Every story belongs to a person. And every person matters to God!

Time to Build is not about building a monument, but creating space for a movement. This year and the years to come thousands of our friends, neighbours and relatives discover new life in Christ in our midst.

### **Church Planting**

We are also creating space for a movement of God as we plant new churches. Newlife – Pac Pines is the first of five new communities we believe God is calling us to plant by 2021. By the end of 2013 we will finalize plans for our second new community, looking to launch in 2014. We don't know where, who, when or how – but God does!

### **Kid's Ministry**

Here at Newlife we are blessed with a growing community of children and teenagers. Last Sunday more than 200 of the 930 people in worship were under the age of 18; more than 300 were under the age of 30. This is so important when you

consider something like 80% of Christians make the decision to follow Jesus before they turn 25. The fields are ripe for harvest in our schools and universities.

Over the last five years Viv Batt has done an amazing job in doubling the size of our children's ministry. In April Viv has decided to shift from her full time role as Children's Pastor into a newly created, part time Families Pastor role. I am really excited to announce this morning that the Elders have approved Heath Perrott as the new full time Children's Pastor, beginning in April. Heath and his wife Samara and their gorgeous girl Rose worship at Pac Pines. Heath is a Primary School teacher currently serving at Kings Christian School. He is a gifted educator, leader, musician and worship leader. We reckon that with Heath and Viv Newlife will be blessed with one of the best children and family ministry teams in Australia.

## **Branding**

Newlife is one big, happy, sometimes dysfunctional family. We are one church, two locations and multiple ministry expressions. We stretch from new babies to 99 year young saints. Every week at least 34 different birth nationalities come together to worship. We are a growing family, in our numbers, diversity and ministry expressions.

Above all though, Newlife is one church with one Lord and one vision. To better express this unity; through 2013 we are rolling out a new communication strategy and visual identity that communicates better still the breadth of who Newlife is.

### ***Watch this video with me:***

We have created a visual identity that ties together all of the diversity of who we are as a church – from Youthstreet to Crossroads, Kidzlife to Newlife Care. Every piece of printed material, sign, electronic communication and social media will have a Newlife look that you will immediately recognize, and we hope over time, people we are trying to reach will recognize.

## **Website**

Part of our communication strategy is a new website. In coming weeks you will see a completely redesigned church website, with a new address that is already current right now – [www.church.nu](http://www.church.nu). Our website is our main window to the Gold Coast community. Most people who come to Newlife for the first time come either because they have been invited by a friend, or they have found us on the website. Our website is a key outreach tool and will be focused on telling people as clearly as possible, 'This is who we are.'

## **Church App**

When it comes to communicating better with those already part of the family, I am really excited to announce that available right now is a new Newlife Church App. Did you know that something like 60% or more of internet traffic happens via mobile devices like smart phones and I pads? This new App, written by Craig, allows you to access all sermon podcasts and notes, blogs, SOAP reflection, the church calendar and in the future will allow you to register for events. It works on Apple and Android and can be downloaded today. It is super cool!

For those of you whose eyes are glazing over at all this talk about apps and iphones and androids – do not fear – we will still be communicating with you!

At the end of the day we are committed to communicating how good we are, but how great God is. We want people to discover and experience what we have with the tools available to us.

In the power of the Spirit, the early church was marked by an infectious spirit of praise and adoration. They took every opportunity to worship and glorify God. The New Testament letters of Paul and Peter and others are marked by doxology – glory giving to God. Paul's words right at the end of Romans illustrate this:

To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.  
(Romans 16:27)

In 2013 God is calling us into greater encounters with Him, that lead to a greater harvest for Him, that give

## Greater glory to God

Sue and I have been married for 24 years. March 15 this year will mark the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of when we started dating. We were in kindergarten. 33 years – that's 33 birthday presents, 33 Christmas presents, 33 anniversary presents. I like to be a little creative in my present giving – but it's getting tough. There is only so much jewelry, perfume and other stuff you can buy. (Some of you are thinking there is no such thing as too much jewelry!). Each year it is getting harder; what do I give Sue that goes at least part way in expressing my love for her?

How much harder is it when we consider what we can give to God? God is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end and the creator of all things. What could we possibly give to God that he does not already have? As the psalmist says, every animal of the forest is his, as is the cattle on a thousand hills.

What we can give God, in fact what we were created for, is this; we can give God glory.

You have heard me quote it many times, but the Westminster Catechism says this:

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

If this is true, how then do we give glory to God? Does God need more glory? No! The bible says the heavens are full of, and declare his glory.

In giving God glory we are not giving him something he does not possess, but are reflecting back something he already is.

Glory begins and ends with God. Our privilege is to share and participate in the glory of God, as we reflect it back to him with lives lived for and to him.

We do not give God glory by doing great things for God. What can we do for God that God has not already done, or could do should he choose? God doesn't need our help- thank God!

We glorify God not by doing great things for God, but by doing great things with God.

The song does not go, 'To God be the glory, great things we have done', but 'To God be the glory, great things he has done.'

The early church did great things with God as they participated in the movement of the Holy Spirit that was blowing and burning in their midst. In the power of the Holy Spirit they saw a great harvest for God that witnessed to the glory of God.

In 2013 God is calling us into greater Holy Spirit encounters with him that lead to a greater harvest for him that gives greater glory to him.

Tim Keller is the Senior Minister of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. He planted Redeemer Presbyterian in 1989 and he admits that he and his wife had just one hope; that they would survive. He was an academic, an introvert and had no direct experience of planting churches. New York was known to be a place where the dreams of church planters go to die. Today, 24 years later, Redeemer Presbyterian is a thriving multi-site church with over 5000 at weekend worship, most of them young urban professionals. Over the past 24 years, Redeemer has helped establish 200 more churches in 35 cities in North America and around the world. As Keller celebrates all God has done, he looks back and remembers his only real aspiration when it all started was to survive. Remembering this, he makes this statement:

I have learned to not dishonor God with low expectations.  
(Tim Keller)

Here at Newlife we will not dishonor God by setting for comfort and security; we will seek to glorify God by stepping out in faith believing God is able.

We will not dishonor God by building a luxury cruise ship that benefits a select few; we will seek to honor God as in the Spirits power we engage in battle seeking out the least, the lost and the lonely.

We will not dishonor God with small dreams, anemic vision and goals we can achieve in our own strength; we will seek to honor God by attempting the impossible, knowing that with God all things are possible.

How will we know if we have given God greater glory in 2013? If we have thought, said, sung and prayed more this year than last, 'Only God!' Only God – Only God can do it, Only God has done it and Only God deserves the glory.

So as we launch into 2013, I invite you – I challenge you:

Don't 'spectate'; participate.

Don't sit back; step up.

Don't observe; engage.

Don't come to church; be the church.

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