

# Vision and Commitment 2024

Dan Leathers

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Over the next half hour or so, we're going to hear a few stories from a number of the front line ministries of St Mark's. Today my question to you is where are you investing, investing your time, your effort, your energy and your money?

Investing is a biblical theme and in the parable of the talents and the minas we see those who invested what was entrusted to them wisely, gain the reward of the master, and more is entrusted to them. Of course the ones who just bury what is given to them have that taken from them and they are left with nothing.

I believe we have a church of investors and givers, that's why St Mark's is doing so much for this community. It's why there is a favour for this church from the community we serve.

But we must never be complacent or take what we have for granted. And I don't want you to ever feel taken for granted. So thank you so much for all you do for St Mark's. Thank you for the ways you have invested in this church community over the years. And thank you for following God's call to follow Him in the giving of your life, your service and your finance to him.

Let's start by taking a look at what your investment and God's power has done among us over the past year.

*Roll video*

Isn't it exciting seeing the fruit of our labour with the Lord.

Turn with me to [Matthew 13:44](#)

I noticed that Robin Gamble in the book 100 days with Jesus which we're reading together, skips the third parable in this selection of parables. Jesus has been on a roll, sharing the parable of the Sower, the wheat and the weeds, the mustard seed, the parable of the yeast. All these parables are about the Kingdom of Heaven and the word of God. The parable of the wheat and weeds is about judgement and then he moves to 3 other parables about

how precious the Kingdom of Heaven is, before we hear he is rejected in Nazareth.

And sometimes, as Robin did, we take the two treasure parables separate from the one after it about the fish, but the phrasing and use of 'Again' suggests that these three are supposed to be heard together, pondered alongside each other.

Let's hear them again.

**Matthew 13:44 NIV 2011**

<sup>44</sup> 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Wow! The treasure was worth everything he had. He sold everything to own the field so that he owned the most precious treasure.

**Matthew 13:45–46 NIV 2011**

<sup>45</sup> 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

<sup>46</sup> When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

It's almost the same parable, with the same rich meaning.

The Kingdom of Heaven is where Jesus reigns supreme. It's the place where He is Lord and where His righteous rule reigns.

Do you believe the Kingdom of Heaven, God's space, is worth giving up everything?

I don't know when you found the kingdom of Heaven, I mean that day you fell in love with Jesus. The day he rescued you?

For me it was that afternoon walk home from school when He met an angry 13 year old who was yelling at him for not being the good God He was meant to be! And boom, I experienced that force field of love which wouldn't let me move and yet overwhelmed me with deep love. That was the day my relationship with Jesus was established and the day I committed my life to serve Him however He asked.

When did He meet with you?

The Kingdom of Heaven is God's space, and the day you turned to Jesus was the day you became a citizen of heaven.

Was it a dramatic encounter with the risen Lord Jesus, or the gentle falling in love which took place over years of attending church or coming to know other Christians and seeing something amazing in their lives which you wanted?

My friends, a relationship with the God of all creation, who sits on His throne of justice, of love and of judgement, is the greatest treasure of all.

Knowing Jesus and living with Him is the most perfect place you can ever live and it is worth all of your possessions, all of your relationships and all of your time and money.

Because He rescues us from our slavery to sin and the eternity without Him as Jesus directly mentions in the parable which sits with these other treasure parables.

**Matthew 13:47-52 NIV 2011**

<sup>47</sup> 'Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.

<sup>48</sup> When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away.

<sup>49</sup> This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous

<sup>50</sup> and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>51</sup> 'Have you understood all these things?' Jesus asked. 'Yes,' they replied.

<sup>52</sup> He said to them, 'Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.'

Friends, as disciples of Christ we are called to be those teachers of the law who have become disciples in the Kingdom of heaven. We are called to bring out of His storeroom new treasures as well as old.

We are called to introduce people to the person of Jesus through loving them, inviting them to opportunities to learn more about Jesus and being prepared to invest time as they journey toward Him.

Friends, it is for their eternal life which we are to do this. Because Jesus is clear, that He is the way the truth and the life, and no-one comes to the Father except through Him.

Belief and trust in Jesus is the gateway to eternal life, and it is worth everything, in fact is worth our very souls.

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I don't know about you, but time is precious. When I'm looking at all the need of friends, family and loved ones, let alone others in our local community, our neighbours and those we pass, it is sometimes a difficult decision where to invest our time and energy.

We need to partner with Jesus in knowing who to help and how and when.

We're now going to hear some testimony from Gerry about where God is at work through the staff and volunteers of T.A.N.G.O

*Gerry shares testimony of what God is doing in T.A.N.G.O*

What do disciples look like at St Mark's?

Well we have a strap line, our values and a rule of life which define disciples in St Mark's in 2024

Our strap line is:

Knowing Jesus - Loving each other - Caring for our Community

Everything we do here MUST be fulfilling at least two of these with movement toward the third.

It's how we position ourselves.

Firstly to Jesus - UP

Then intentionally loving each other - IN

And missionally focused on this community of Haydock - OUT

And we conduct our business by **our values**

We need to be:

**All involved** - everyone gets to play and we all expect to get serving

**Becoming Disciples** - we're all on a journey to become more like Jesus as we live and learn with Him daily

**Creating Community** - we intentionally create spaces of community in an ever increasingly isolationist world

**Doing Evangelism** - we intentionally seek to introduce people to Jesus

**Encountering God** - we expect to meet with God when we gather together

And we do this through our rule of life

That each of us commits to daily patterns as we are:

Called to:

- Pray
- Read
- Learn

Sent to:

- Tell
- Serve
- Give

I like to use the trellis as our symbol of this.

Now, I'd love Claire and Lynne to share how they are seeing this in action as they share some testimony from the food pantry and Life and Life's involvement with it

*Claire and Lynne to share testimony of what God is doing in*

Now let's hear an update on our financial situation which I've turned into a short video which will sit on our website giving page if you want to see it again.

*Giving video – See text on the final page*

When I'm asking the Lord where I should give, I love to hear about the work of what God is doing through my investment. When I hear God is at work, it moves me to want to continue my investment and often to raise my investment.

God is doing so much among us, that I've even been approached by others from outside of Merseyside asking how they can invest financially in what God is doing here.

So, I'd love to invite Leisa to share some testimony of what God is doing through Brew & Renew

*Leisa to share*

*Richard to share an update on Youth*

Some thoughts from Sarah Shipley shared in this transcript for those who missed the service

I know that we are making a difference to the young people. They have a safe place to come and are learning respect, friendship and how relevant the Bible is today. We are shining God's light into their week.

They appreciate the food provided, it makes such a difference.

A few good news stories:

M- has been coming to youth for 2 years, doesn't always appear to engage/listen but after suffering a close family bereavement she wanted to speak to you (Dan) and appreciated us saying we would pray for her and her family. It really shows how we are reaching them, even when it doesn't seem like it.

C - very shy and quiet, brought a book first time and sat reading it, not wanting to chat. She now engages more in conversation and has a laugh with friends which is great to see.

T - very shy and quiet and doesn't have many friends. He now engages more in conversation/games

So what is the vision that I am asking you to invest, continue to invest and maybe even increase your investment in.

It's quite simple, **the vision is growth** in 3 key areas.

### **Missional**

- we pray for growth at every Sunday gathering and when we meet mid week
- the leadership are engaged in conversations called 'Leading Your Church into Growth' which is helping us connect many of the things we're doing
- the next sermon series will focus on becoming more intentional and better equipped in joining Jesus in His mission to the world
- exploring a new brick church congregation - the focus is less children and youth here but more about engaging with families of young people. We do great work with children and youth, but it's their families we haven't reached as well as we could

### **Numerical**

- we are trusting the Lord for an increase in numbers, not just in our ministries but here in church on a Sunday
- Sunday growth is most likely to come through you inviting people to church, or if their not ready for church, inviting them to one of the many other things we are doing.
- this year we must be more intentional about inviting those we meet through our ministries and who we do life with. Our alpha courses have had a really poor uptake since the pandemic. Alison and I are going to map our a year planner which you will have access to physically and through our new church app which is nearly ready. With more time to pray about which of your friends you're inviting, and time to ask them, I'm hoping you'll take that leap of faith and ppo the question about Jesus or exploring faith.
- The talking Jesus research done in 2022 shows that our friends and colleagues are more likely to be open to a conversation with us than we think.

### **Spiritual**

- at our ministry leaders and PCC away day in March the church leaders decided they didn't like the model as we were first looking at it and felt we needed a reshape in thinking about these three areas of growth
- our spiritual growth, our discipleship with Jesus is the most important growth for us as a church leadership, because from healthy disciples everything else flows.
- how is your first love? How is your relationship with Jesus? Is it worth everything?
- how often do you spend time with Jesus daily?

- how often do you meet with others in a connect group or work place bible study
- who are you praying with regularly?

So friends, how does the Lord want you to invest in St Mark's this year?

Financially, the biblical amount we often mention is the 10% tithe which Abraham felt led to give to Melchizedek the Priest of God.

Jesus said

**Luke 12:34 NIV 2011**

<sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

For Claire and I, a couple of years into being here, we felt the Lord call us to give 10% of our income direct to St Mark's and to actually give less to some of the other charities we were supporting, as an investment and statement of where our focus in mission is.

Now this is between you and the Lord, and if you are in a couple where your spouse isn't a believer, I do appreciate there is a unique extra consideration you'll be doing.

But it's not just financial giving we're talking about today.

Where do you serve in this community and are there new areas God is calling you to serve in?

For instance:

- |                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| • Children team    | • Sung Worship   |
| • Youth team       | • T.A.N.G.O      |
| • Sound team       | • Food Pantry    |
| • Visuals team     | • Wardens team   |
| • Hospitality team | • Mission events |
| • Welcome team     |                  |

What I'm asking you to do today is to take your pledge form away and to pray. You could re-watch this talk or parts of it and ask the Lord where he wants you to invest in this Church community today.

Let's spend some time with the Holy Spirit now



## Giving video

Friends, as a giver to St Mark's it is important you know how we spend the money you entrust to us. You give as a church family member to both the running of St Mark's, but also in our work in the local community.

These are the projected budget figures set in spring this year by PCC, and each budget holder is accountable for keeping to the budget.

You'll see our tithe listed here. We always tithe 10% of the income we receive to the church. The reason it says 8% here is because this is the expenditure of a budget with a deficit. We give 10% of all our income to honour God, acknowledging that what is entrusted to us is his and not ours. It goes to the work of all our mission partners.

Utilities were set at 14% of our expenditure this year. This includes the expected increase of £10,000 to our utilities bills which is another huge hike in price, as we didn't feel the full effect of rising prices last year again. Which means our estimate may be higher than the reality, but we'd rather budget wisely and anticipate a large increase.

Salaries are an important part of our expenditure as we pay a number of staff in order to facilitate the mission of St Mark's. It's important we use that phrasing because the staff of St Mark's aren't employed to do the mission, but to enable mission and you to be released into mission yourselves. We couldn't run St Mark's as we do, with all our outreach and discipleship work without the paid employment of our staff team.

There are various expenses required for the youth, children and clergy teams, however, these figures only represent the specific pots. There is a much wider and shared investment in children and youth represented particularly in salaries and sundries.

We now upkeep and maintain 4 buildings which take 21% of our expenditure and there are other costs for the office, outreach, IT systems, equipment and other smaller items represented particularly in Verna's Sundries slice.

Due to ending last year yet again in deficit, we made the difficult decision to reduce our parish share contribution. The parish share pays both for the cost of a minster, the training of curates, the housing of clergy, roles in the Diocese such as Archdeacons and Bishops, and as a larger church we have been a net giver since at least the 1990's and so anything above about 67,000 was toward the cost of minsters in poorer and smaller churches. So it is with great sadness that the PCC made the hard decision to reduce our giving and for the first time in our history not to pay the full parish share contribution which the Diocese ask of us. So this year only 26% of our expenditure will be given to the church commissioners. It's both part of our commitment and membership to the church of England and half pays for you to have a vicar. I should say that I don't receive even half of our expenditure directly into my pocket. However, it does provide for the vicarage and many of the legal structures which it takes to maintain a full-time clergy person.

Now for the big headers.

The cost of ministry last years was £259,489

And that doesn't include the £81,000 investment we made into our buildings when each of our 30 year boilers failed one after the other. PCC approved that spend after the sale of our house on Wagon Lane which is one of our final capitol assets.

And we did end the year with a deficit £28,405 which has once again dented our reserves due to the cost of living crisis and both the pinch to our own pockets and the increase in all goods.

The cost of ministry this year is estimated to be £265,458

If we assume there are 150 people who regularly give and worship with St Mark's across the month, that would make the personal cost of ministry at St Mark's £34 per week per adult.

Basically, if every member of St Mark's gave £34 per week, we would break even by the end of 2024. There are actually more of us worshipping in this church community, but not everyone comes every week and not everyone is giving.

Not everyone is in a position to give that much, but my question is less "how close are you giving to that figure", which is just to help you see just how much it costs to continue our church community as it is, and more "what are you giving?"

If everyone were giving and we ask Jesus what that sacrificial figure is, we will be able to see even more people reached for His love.

This year, based on the income we currently know about the projected deficit at the end of 2024 is of £43,882.

This does not include the £40,000 repair to the wall from the New Futures Designate account

It's a sobering figure and I want to assure you that PCC and Standing Committee are keeping a close eye on this. We do not spend frivolously, we have paired down and streamlined as much as we believe we can without changing significant mission and ministry investment.

But we are not despairing. We need your support to help us reduce the deficit, and we believe God is leading us into growth, which is why we're not panicking. We seek to be wise stewards of God's finances here and completely faithful in our trust in Him.

What our prayer needs to be today is, "Jesus, are you happy with my gift to my church family? If so please give me a peace in my heart. If not, please give me the weekly figure I should be working toward and I trust you will provide for me as I change it."