

# LEAD ON

## THREE WORDS FOR THE JOURNEY: VISIBILITY, INVITATION AND PARTICIPATION

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The last couple of years – with their compounding challenges on a global and personal level have really made us more aware of our own vulnerability, haven't they? Whether it's the pandemic or the war in Ukraine; natural disasters, the cost of living crisis, the political crisis in our own nation or indeed the turmoil in the Church of England – the veneer of control and security that our western democracies have afforded for many seem to have been stripped bare. Where do we turn for something more solid and more enduring?

It's not just our vulnerability that has been laid bare, but we have been confronted by our own mortality too. Covid made us walk too long in the valley of the shadow of death... and it still stalks us, lurking in the shadows. Where can we turn with the resulting big questions about life and death?

There is still a sense that the world is struggling to rise from the ashes and rebuild. I wonder if we who have found in Christ Jesus the most solid, defiant hope can position ourselves to be the ones who call others to rise from the ashes. As I prayed for a word in season – praying that we/I would understand the signs of the times and know the best course to take, I landed on three words to ponder and act on in this season:

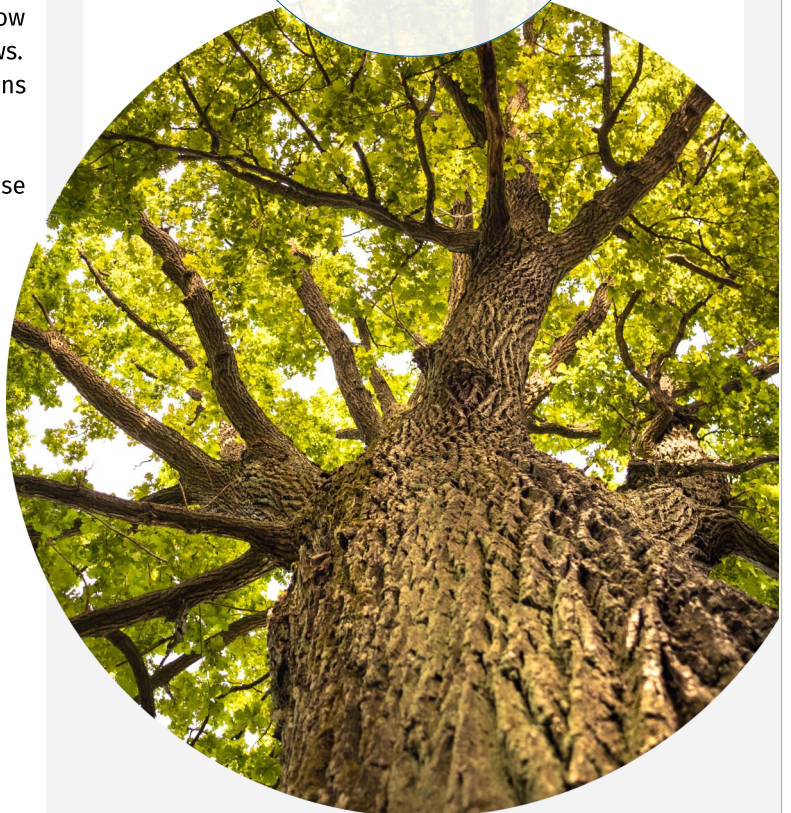
**1 Visibility**

**2 Invitation**

**3 Participation**

Inspired by Christ's manifesto in Luke 4, quoting Isaiah 61, I am particularly drawn to verse 3b:

'THEY WILL BE CALLED  
OAKS OF  
RIGHTEOUSNESS,  
A PLANTING OF THE LORD  
FOR THE DISPLAY OF HIS  
SPLENDOUR.'



## Visibility

The first word I want to commend is visibility.

Did you hear this echoed in the wonderful words from verse 3: **‘for the display of his splendour’?**

On display... The stuff that we do outside our building really matters. I received this email recently: ‘Please can you tell me when the next baptism date is. I am now ready to commit my life to Jesus wholeheartedly, now and forever’. This person started coming to church when they heard us singing Amazing Grace in the churchyard.

Visibility has become a conscious conversation partner in our planning. A number of people in the community, who are not members of our church, have thanked me for the Christmas lights, the art window we have in the High Street, for the Easter display and other art in our churchyard, and the wonderful ten days of mission last year – under the banner of ‘Love Egham’. For ten days we were intentional in looking for visible ways to bless our town – including giving tea and coffee and pastries to morning commuters at our train station. People in the community have described them as signs of hope.

I want to commend this word ‘Visibility’ as a helpful conversation partner as we seek to position ourselves as rebuilders – the hope and freedom bearers described in Isaiah. And visibility requires very little for those who are looking.

I am convinced that there are so many in our communities walking in darkness, yet nowhere near ready to make themselves visible to us – but we can be visible to them. A light shining in the darkness – so that they too can be caught up in Isaiah’s prophecy in 9:2.

## Invitation

First, visibility. Second, invitation.

As we reflect on this second word, I am reminded again of how important invitation is to my own story.

1992 – my Christians friends at university invited me to dozens of events at the church and beyond. I declined every one. I remained their friend. I say this because sometimes people tell me they don’t invite their friends because they are afraid they will offend them.


1993 – my Christians friends invited me to dozens of events at their Church. I declined every one. I remained their friend.

In my final year in 1994 – I said yes and on 31 March 1994, I met the living Lord.

In my dream world, every Christian awakens to the power of invitation, and the awakening overrides fear.

Research suggests that about 25% of adults would go to church if a friend would just invite them. Many people will come to church when someone they know and trust invites them and offers to accompany them. Sadly, according to research into Western Christianity, 80-94% of Christians have no intention of inviting anyone – and fear is the main barrier.

I am here because I had friends who persisted in loving me and inviting me to church and church events. I eventually said ‘yes’ and met Jesus. Consider (again) the story from John 1:45-46, when Philip found Nathanael and told him about Jesus. “Come and see”, said Philip’.



**THE PEOPLE WHO WALK IN DARKNESS  
WILL SEE A GREAT LIGHT.  
FOR THOSE WHO LIVE IN A LAND  
OF DEEP DARKNESS,  
A LIGHT WILL SHINE.**





This follows John's account of how Andrew also went and invited his brother, Peter. Come and see. Come with me. I am so grateful that my university friends persisted in inviting me. The invitations plus the way they lived their lives – the visibility of their faith – finally got me to say yes. And I met Jesus and my life was changed forever. It is the best decision that I have ever made. He has given me a life worth living. I found in him the unshakeable anchor for my soul.

## Participation

First visibility, second invitation and third participation...

John 4 again – the story about Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Just a little extract from verse 7:

'WHEN A SAMARITAN WOMAN CAME TO DRAW WATER, JESUS SAID TO HER, "WILL YOU GIVE ME A DRINK?"'



I am obviously taking our own participation as read. We have a gospel to proclaim. We want to be a part of Jesus' work of rebuilding the church. I often say at St John's that I am absolutely convinced that through the empowering of the Holy Spirit and our gospel partnership, we have everything we need to meet the challenges and opportunities of this hour. That presupposes the priesthood of all believers – all God's people using their gifts – I hope we can take that as read...

Beyond that, I want to encourage us to be thoughtful about how we can develop partnerships with others in the community.

Samaritan woman, would you give me water? In our case, in Egham, we might ask:

Egham Band, would you lead the music at our new Easter Family Fun day? Two years of asking, they haven't said yes yet. Chair of the Egham Chamber of Commerce, would you give out prizes at our Mothering Sunday Service? Friend, we are building a tomb at church for Easter, would you come and help me? You are brilliant at such and such, would you come and help? With the Egham Town Team, we are working to develop Egham as a festival town.

My favourite moment was when a member of the Egham Town Team, who is not a Christian, said this: 'Esther, he said, 'what you want to do is create an expansive space where everyone is invited. Some people might want the full Jesus experience that you offer, others may not, but the message is all are invited.' It's early days, but already through that partnership, we are widening engagement; and I now quote him as I invite people into a full Jesus experience.

Jesus drew the Samaritan woman in with the invitation for her to do something – to participate. 'Jesus said to

her, “Will you give me a drink?” John 4:7. You know how the story ends. A life transformed. A town transformed. That’s our heart’s desire, isn’t it?

I want to commend to you these three words as framework to help us respond to the times that we are in: Visibility, Invitation and Participation.

I have no doubt that life will continue to throw curve balls and we will have unexpected twists and turns – both at home and abroad. But we who have found in Christ Jesus the most solid, defiant hope, can position ourselves to be the ones who call others to rise from the ashes of the post pandemic world. God can work through us to rebuild lives, communities, and cities.

### HOW CAN YOU INCREASE YOUR VISIBILITY IN YOUR CONTEXT?



- Spend a few minutes in prayer – pray for your congregations. Pray the invitation muscle is strengthened through exercise.
- What does, or what would, your equivalent of wider participation look like in your context?

