

Today we are building from our conversation last week about what it means for us when we are ONE, a team, united in faith, (you know the sermon I misspoke about Lombardi’s Steelers? That was a test to see who was listening. A couple of you passed 😊). Either it was Lombardi’s Packers or Knoll’s Steelers- both were great teams, but I digress. What we are invited to encounter today as a congregation is what it means when we have shared vision. Having a shared vision is perhaps the first great step for us as a congregation in becoming ONE, just as God originally desired and Jesus so passionately prays for.

Let’s start by laying the groundwork for vision. Vision gives us a sense of our true north. I am not sure this means necessarily that every decision will be based on a predetermined standard, but it does serve as a marker to direct or redirect our path and ensure we’re staying true to the desired course. Here is a good question: How do we know the desired course? What is the vision exactly?

Do we just pick a path on our own and get to it? A world in which everyone is going their own way seems a bit chaotic doesn’t it? Oh wait, seems we don’t have to look far for that example today. To answer the question of “What is the Vision?”, we don’t need to be Yogi Berra and stand at a fork in the road and simply take it. And we don’t need to worry whether we have plucked the right one out of left field or drawn the right straw or received the right hand from the dealer. A vision is not something random we end up with and are left to figure out on our own. A vision is something of great purpose. Where do we turn to encounter great purpose? Better yet, who do we turn to for the most paramount purpose in our lives? God! God is the one we turn to for wisdom and understanding. And we know, as God’s people, Christ’s body, the Church, God has portrayed for us a vision that is to be embraced by us and shared by all.

There are several places in scripture that help bring God’s vision for us as God’s people, Christ’s body, the Church, to light.

The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 1:8-9, “With all wisdom and understanding, [God] made known [revealed] to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.” This is awesome. God, the source of all wisdom and understanding, has made known to us, you and me, God’s will, and God has done that through Christ Jesus. This is a great place for us to build our understanding of vision. Shortly after this we read in Ephesians 3:14-20...

What did we just hear? We heard that **“God . . . is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of — infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes”** (Ephesians 3:20 TLB). It is like God comes along and says, “Think up the biggest thing you

think I can do in your life, in your ministry, in your church — and I can top that. I can beat it.” God wants what is best for each of us and all of us collectively and God alone has the power and provision to follow through and deliver. When we believe this, we are able to ask ourselves this question, “What would we attempt for God if we knew we couldn’t fail?” And then, in pursuit of what God puts in front of us, **“to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”**

**“To God be glory!”** Is that God’s shared vision for us as God’s people, Christ’s body, the church? Yes! But what does that mean? What might that look like?

First and foremost, it means and looks like having **faith and trust in God** above all else and in everything. With the early church, vision as revealed throughout the Scriptures wasn’t a small group of disciples sitting down in a boardroom and brainstorming ideas. It started with a people desperately seeking God, pursuing with persistence until the Lord delivered. Acts 1 and 2 reveal to us that even though the disciples were able to do great things in the previous days, something powerful happens when you let go of your vision for you and grab hold of God’s vision for you. What happens is you climb the ladder from your wants to God’s dream (*way up here*). The disciples, like us, may have been able to see with 20/20 vision or maybe even 20/10—pretty good, huh? God’s vision, however, is precise vision, perfect vision, no matter what. Can we acknowledge that it is God who is able to do far more than we could ever dare to ask or even imagine? Sounds good to me, sign me up, let’s go!

At the core of who we are as God’s people, Christ’s body, the church, we are called to advance God’s cause and we get started by asking God, “What do you want me to do? How do you want me to do it? And when do you want me to do it?” What this means is that the shared vision God shares is from God and about God and we are given the privilege and opportunity to be a part of it with God. How cool is that? We are part of Team God, Team Jesus, Team Holy Spirit. (Luke: “Let’s Go!”)

With faith and trust in God, we can begin to open our hearts and minds and lives to the incredible gifts God has envisioned for us to experience. In Zechariah, God’s vision unfolds majestically. God’s vision is that we, as God’s people, provide a living witness to God’s goodness and beauty: “like the jewels of a crown they shall shine throughout the land. For how great is God’s goodness, and how great is God’s beauty!” (Zechariah 9:16, 17). This vision of the Church as glorious, shining, and exalted is consistent with what we see elsewhere in the prophets (cf. Micah 4:1-5; Haggai 2:6-9) and the Psalms (cf. Psalm 48). It matches Jesus’ own words in Matthew 5:13-16 and those of Paul in Ephesians 2:19-22 and Peter in 1 Peter 2:9, 10.

God doesn’t save us and empower us only to leave us to muddle through in religious routines that impact no one for spiritual strength and holy living. Like the dew that brings refreshment to the earth, we, as God’s people, Christ’s body, the Church, are intended to water the world with God’s grace, in daily droplets of good works and words

of truth that edify and nurture all around (Micah 5:7). But like the king of beasts, we, as God's people, Christ's body, the Church, are also intended for rule, to leave an impression, wherever it exists, of the righteousness, peace, and joy of God's Spirit-ruled Kingdom (Micah 5:8; Romans 14:17).

Further, the Lord calls us, as God's people, Christ's body, the church, to aspire to greatness in God's name. God intends us to be strong, like a mighty warrior, filled with gladness and joy, and raising up a generation of children who share their enthusiasm for the work of the Lord (Zechariah 10:6, 7). God's vision for us as the Church is of a great army, fully armed, well-disciplined, clear as to its mission, and filled with zeal for the battle. God is gathering people from all parts of the world, and every neighborhood of our communities, in order to equip us for the work of the Kingdom (vv. 8-10). God intends to fill up churches with new recruits for the great Kingdom struggle to which God has called us (v. 10). And though we will meet with opposition and affliction, we will be strong, and will walk uprightly in the name of the Lord (vv. 11, 12).

**Zechariah provides a poetic prophecy of God's vision for us to embrace and share: be glorious, shining in goodness and beauty, strong and filled with gladness, drawing people in from all around, equipping young and old alike to take up the work of the Kingdom with joy, bursting at the seams, prevailing through trial and affliction.** Yes! That sounds like church to me!

Did you know, through years of prayerful discernment and seeking desperately after God's vision for First Presbyterian Church of Lynchburg, our shared vision, "sense of true north", carries a similar expression? God's vision (call it a mission too) for First Presbyterian in this time and in this place, as a part of God's kingdom is to "Celebrate God's Grace and Inspire the Next Generation for Christ." I love it! Ten words of shared vision for us to embrace and share.

And did you know God believes we can be whom God calls us to be and God believes we can do it? I believe in whom God is calling us to be and I believe we can do it. How about all of us together? Do we believe in God's call for us? (I can't hear you!) Do we believe in God's shared vision for us?

To celebrate God through prayer and praise to God for all God is worth; coming together to worship God here on Sunday mornings or perhaps at other special opportunities; showing up to be with one another in fellowship and service and growing. We don't all have to hang out all the time together, but celebrating God's grace is embodied in our acceptance of one another and support of one another and forgiveness of one another and the hospitality we share with one another. In Christ, we are not strangers to one another. We are sisters and brothers, united in the power of God's grace and love. That bond is stronger than any other bond we can know and to live it out is to celebrate God's grace.

To inspire others for Christ. Yes, the children of this church and this community need their space and their opportunity to explore, discover, run with their tiny feet and short strides, create, question, and be in all the joyous and exciting ways God has created them. And the Weekday School and Sunday School and youth group are not the only places for this. It is essential for them all to have their time in all ministries and opportunities to grow without restriction to the work God is doing in them. From the infants and toddlers in the nursery to the best fidget spinners and “going to the bathroom” adventurers. From those who read well and sit well to those who are filled with so much joy they can’t possibly contain it or settle for a second. From those who color inside the lines and learn their ABC’s quickly to those who like to expand the page and fumble through concepts. Christ’s love is there for them all and Christ has no bounds to the inspiration and opportunities for each to become exactly who God has created them to be.

To inspire others for Christ is not limited to age though. We all need inspiration and encouragement. From those who find those prepackaged communion sets difficult to open to those who can whip up a batch of homemade goodies good enough to sell at the local bakery. From those who have participated in this church since they were born to those who may be visiting for the first time today. From those who seem to have it all together in life to those who haven’t had anything go their way for quite some time. From those who have a reputable career and healthy retirement fund to those who have bounced from job to job (maybe even been unemployed) and live day to day, week to week, month to month. From those who cheer on the Hoos to those who cheer on the Hokies. From those who can be present in the sanctuary to those who listen in on the radio or connect through video opportunity. Christ’s love is there for us all and Christ has no bounds to the inspiration and opportunities for each of us to become exactly who God has created us to be.

When we have shared vision, we become ONE with God and Christ Jesus and one another, embodying faith and trust, shining in goodness and beauty, celebrating and inspiring!

When we have shared vision... Do we believe? (I can’t hear you!) Do we believe?