

**March 25, 2012
Nehemiah 1:1-4
Creekside COB
Pastor Janet Shaver**

“R U a Visionary?”

JOKE:

Joe wanted to be hired at A Men’s Shop And The Owner Took The Candidate To A Men’s Suit That Was Horrible, Colors Were Too Bright, The Jacket And The Trousers Did Not Fit And The Seams Were Badly Made. The Suit Was 20 Years Old And Out Of Fashion, But Very Expensive. Owner "if You Sell This Suit In Two Hours The Job Is Yours"

Two Hours He Returns And Joe Had Sold The Suit, But All His Clothes Are Torn And He Was Full Of Scratches. Owner "no-one Has Been Able To Sell The Suit For 20 Years, What Did You Do?" Joe "I Sold It To A Blind Man, But his guide dog gave me quite a bit of trouble."

We do not have to physically see a vision to know what it looks like. We have the spirit of God leading us.

This is the final sermon on the new Church of the Brethren Vision statement. Let’s read the statement together.

**“Through scripture, Jesus calls us
To live as courageous disciples by work and action:
To surrender ourselves to God
To embrace one another,
To express God’s love for all creation.”**

Today I want to talk to you about the importance of vision. Vision is essential in the church. Visions change over the lifetime of a church. The vision changes but not the core principle of the vision and this is the “great commission.” The vision is a visual of what the great Commission might look like.

LONG GONE ILLUSTRATION

For instance long gone are the days of Billy Graham and Billy Sunday, two great evangelists who brought thousands of people into realization of Christ.

Long gone are our churches packed to the brim on Sunday morning. Long gone are the same old ways that we remember.

Our society is different and our vision of reaching them has to be different. No longer can we place a sign on the drive and hoping we will attract people to come. Society has so much keeping them from coming. They find their pleasure and fulfillment in fleeting things -- in vanities.

NEHEMIAH SUFFERING FROM THE LONG GONES

Upon hearing of the returning people into Jerusalem, he laments and grieves over their suffering -- his people who he loves with all his heart are broken people because of the demise of the Jerusalem wall.

They may have the long gones, too. Gone are the days of fellowship and honor in God. Gone are the days where Israel was a great nation. So many memories and so many losses.

As all of our members of the Church of the Brethren, we might all have a sense of grief over people who used to belong here and the great programs we used to have. We used to baptize people in droves and all families and children would come to church throughout the week and life revolved around church.

NEHEMIAH SETS A VISION

But Nehemiah comes along and he has a vision, a longing to restore Jerusalem. And he begins the process in prayer and in that he moves forward in his trust for God and he begins steps to fulfill the project. I am sure the Church of the Brethren saw a need for a new vision. And they assigned a group of people to accomplish the task. The COB is beginning to make the steps into fulfilling their project.

WE EVALUATE OUR VISION TO FIND A NEW WAY TO REACH THE CULTURE.

So we are here beginning to realize a new vision statement.

You know when I began to think about this sermon and what I wanted to say about our vision. I began to see it as a personal statement -- statement that applied to our own discipleship - our own personal discipleship. How can I preach a church vision with a personal statement of discipleship?

I think we can look at the way we live out the “Great Commission” in a personal way and begin to look at the way we reach the new culture. We reach them in a most personal way.

REACH SOCIETY IN A MOST PERSONAL WAY

We reach them in relationship. We meet them in a personal way. We meet them at the point of our own discipleship. In the way we act and live out our salvation.

Do you remember a few years back there was a great saying among the churches?

“Each one, reach one.”

This is a simple way to think about our vision and why it is important. When we think about our vision statement and we decide to reach one with the personal discipleship statement. Our long gone days would be back. When you think about Nehemiah? He decided to give everything up to God in prayer. He wept over his people and surrendered it to God in prayer.

Anyone can have a vision for the church? We can all be visionaries? Well, we want something grander and bigger for God’s kingdom in our church. Maybe for some of us we can’t figure out how to get it started or what would need to be done to do it but we all have a vision. We don’t always think about it or put it in words. But it is there.

What is it about vision that generates a movement in the church?

What is it that Nehemiah’s vision did for the people of Israel?

Gave Them a Sense of Purpose

In the PEANUTS cartoon series Lucy is in business as a psychiatrist. "Advice 5 cents," says her sign. Charlie Brown is her client. "Lucy, I need help," he says woefully. "What can I do for a purpose in life?" Lucy responds, "Oh, don't worry, Charlie. It's like being on a big ocean liner making its way through the sea. Some folks put their deck chairs to face the bow of the ship, and others place their chairs to face the side of the ship or the back of the ship. Which way do you face, Charlie?" Charlie Brown concludes sadly, "I can't even unfold the deck chair."

The church needs a purpose too. Without it we would be like the Jewish people in Nehemiah. They were in great trouble and shame. They could not live up to the people they were called to be.

They like Charlie Brown like all of us need a sense of purpose.

That is what having a vision does for us. It gives us a sense of value and worth. It helps us live into our calling as Christians.

Each person that built the wall with Nehemiah knew what they were called to do and they did it with God in mind. They all gained a sense of meaning in their lives. We begin to see how each one of us makes a difference in the vision. We are all part of a vital church.

What would it look like if the church wanted to realize the Church of the Brethren vision?

We might look for opportunities to aid and assist Christian or non-Christians who exemplify God's desire for reconciliation of the world.

ILLUSTRATION:

Just 10 days after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Rais Bhuiyan was working at a gas station in Dallas when he was shot in the face by a man named Mark Stroman.

Stroman was on a shooting spree, targeting people who appeared to be Muslim or of Middle Eastern descent. Stroman is due to be executed July 20; Bhuiyan, the only survivor of the attacks, is fought to save his life.

Among other things, Bhuiyan is worked directly with Stroman's attorney, who is appealed the sentence. Bhuiyan offers this to the reporter:

In Islam it says that saving one human life is the same as saving the entire mankind. Since I forgave him, all those principles encouraged me to go even further, and stop his execution and save another human life.

We are committed in a purpose one that helps us live out our salvation as courageous disciples.

When we personally and as a body of Christ begin to realize our vision, we move in that direction to align ourselves with the actions of those who partake of our vision.

We get a sense of purpose in all we do. And when we are all moving in the same direction with the same purpose, our vision gives us a sense of unity.

Gave them A Sense of Unity

Nehemiah's Vision encouraged unity among the people. Each Jew had a part in the restoration. Each one used their gifts and character to be a part of a bigger picture.

What is it that causes that unity?

It is a common identity. They had a common identity in their own love of Jerusalem, the people and their vision of re-building the wall.

Our vision is to be courageous in all we do -- surrendering ourselves to God for the greater good -- embracing all people -- caring for all God has created.

ILLUSTRATION FOR UNITY:

I remember a few years back when Will Smith was making the talk show circuit he spoke a lot about unity in the world. I have noticed that unity and disunity are such major themes in our society.

In fact, his family philosophy was if you were not making a contribution to the family society you could not be a part of that

society. He said everyone should make a contribution to society and if you do not, you do not belong in mainstream society.

I believe that is much easier said from a seat of prosperity and wellness.

That is certainly not embracing others who are different than we are. We find unity in placing a value on each person and helping them live into a life of worth.

That is the way we embrace others. That is the way that the church will grow. Not with the stipulation that you either do or die.

This really builds momentum and energy.

Gave them Spiritual Energy

JOKE:

At a family gathering, a grandmother was coaxed into doing something she had never done before. After much friendly badgering, she climbed slowly up on an exercise bike. She took her time getting in just the right position. She waited a few moments. Then, nervously, she said, "All right, you can turn it on now."

She didn't realize she needed a sense of momentum.

That is what happens when we have a vision.

When we are focused in the same direction and everyone has a purpose

A vision is inspirational. A vision gives us hope.

Not much was happening in Nehemiah's day. The people had no vision. Jerusalem lay in ruins, and no one was motivated to do anything about it (Nehemiah 1:3). Then along came Nehemiah with a vision from God to rebuild the gates and walls of the city.

When our vision resonates with our values and mission, the Holy Spirit moves and gives us momentum.

Nehemiah gave his people a sense of hope, a sense of promise and they were able to see the vision too. They were able to believe that there was an opportunity to restore.

CLOSING:

WE ARE ALL VISIONARIES

Before anything else, I believe that we are to do what Nehemiah did, he put it all into prayer. He prayed to God concerning his dream, his repentance on who they were and God's promise of restoration.

Praying the vision into being is a great foundation. The Spirit leads us into the places where we can be courageous:

what to surrender, how to embrace others' not like us and courageous in our caring for creation.

But it will take all of us.

Proverbs says

With a lack of vision, my people perish.

Israel nation was perishing -- churches are perishing

We set the vision -- we all work toward the vision - God infuses us with the Holy Spirit -- walls and churches are restored .

Can You see it?