

Living with a new vision

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Several years ago, whenever I drove from my home in Chambersburg, PA to Towson, Maryland, I passed by an auto shop just west of Gettysburg that had a sign with interesting sayings. The one saying that really caught my eye one early morning said, “Quit looking behind you, you're not heading that way.” How true! I looked in the rearview mirror to see where I had been moments before and then looking ahead to a beautiful sunrise over the battle fields of Gettysburg. I also knew that new opportunities and challenges were awaiting me.

As I thought about what this saying meant, I easily dwelt on how the years of my life and the learning's of the past have brought me to where I am today. I have been building on each event, experience and opportunity as living passages in my life to get me to be who I am today. Yet, God is calling me to the future and whatever awaits me. God is still going to be there no matter what!

Quite a number of years ago, I came to understand and believe that the past is the past and I cannot change it. Yet, I can do things differently today to chart a new and desired future. I'm the only one, with God's guidance, that can make and seek my desired future. There is no person who can scare me, derail me or hurt me to endeavor to a future with God.

I believe God brought me to valley Presbyterian Church for a reason. Some I understand and others I struggled with in the challenges that confronted me. My God has called me here.

Almost two years ago, I began my journey with you as your Transitional Pastor to assist you in restoring and healing this church, this congregation, to a place of wholeness. The previous years were wrought with destructive behaviors, personal triangulation between members and staff which contributed too many unpleasant and tragic events.

The Journey Ahead Group intentionally listened to all who were concerned about the life of this church. The magnitude of the review leads to recommendations which affirmed joys and determined the ways to address issues. The recommendations were approved by Session as a way to move forward with reconciliation and love. This same report was approved by the Commission on Ministry of de Cristo Presbytery as the basis of the Mission Study for the Pastor Nominating Committee. This report took 4 to 5 months off the process.

Now, going back a couple of years on my first Sunday here in late March of 2017, I shared some thoughts on our journey into the future. I invited you then “To join me in a relationship so I can enter your lives” as a new reality is experienced especially with death; the death of your former pastor. It was then I set out a partial vision about what we were going to be about; a vision of hope through our time together. As I said then as I say today, there is always hope.

The vision of where a church is at in a moment in time and where we were/are headed is based on Psalms 23. It affirms “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” But specifically verse 4 states where the congregation was in its life

at that time. **“4Even though i walk through the darkest valley, fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.”** You can hear my thoughts for the journey on the church’s webpage under sermons for 2017. What I said back then is coming to fruition today.

What is compelling about this vision is that we were walking through the dark valley. It doesn’t say we remain there. This congregation continues to move forward by walking to the light, the light of a loving and gracious God. See God here today.

Now, the assurance of God’s presence is evident where the sheep said, **“for you are with me.”** Yes, God is with you and me as we move forward. God is there. God is here. We just don’t know what God has in mind for us. This renewal of life and vision is where we are. Without a doubt, keeping the vision of the Lord alive is what we strive for in life and in faith. Where God is always leading us.

I ask that you keep the Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders in their ministry in moving this congregation further into the future with lots of prayer. They are striving to make the new Mission Statement, which you see on the front of the bulletin, a living reality for the present and into the future. A vision of reconciliation, of love, of respect and of care; this is what we are all about.

Yes, there are some here who want to take the church back to the past to the way it was. I really believe that this church doesn’t want to go back down that path again. I would encourage you to freely move into the future with hope and with the knowledge that God is there. Keep your eyes on God. Let go of the past and embrace the future. Another way I can put it is: The Implementation Vision Train is leaving the station. It’s moving forward.

The passage from Job is a response to his friends who have been questioning him about the Lord who was supposedly with him throughout the losses in his life.

However, Job was so caught up in all the turmoil of his life that he became confused and lost sight of the Lord. He answered his friends, **2“Today also my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy despite my groaning. 3Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his dwelling! 4I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.** He was so distraught that he failed to see or hear God. **8“If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; 9on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him.**

As Job went through the experience of loss and pain, he eventually regained confidence in the Lord. With his renewed heart, mind and soul in God, Job embraced the hope in the Almighty God, the Loving God. Job knew that God was ever present because the Lord reassured him. Like Job, we too regain a new vision for life personally and as a body of Christ. God is here. God is there.

Someone once wrote this about vision. **Vision: the capacity to create a compelling picture of the desired state of affairs that inspires people to respond; that which is desirable, which could be, should be; that which is attainable. A godly vision is right for the times, right for the church, and right for the people. A godly vision promotes faith rather than fear. A godly vision motivates people to action. A godly vision requires risk-taking. A godly vision glorifies god, not people.**

My friends, the Lord places before us a vision on how we are to live and act as Christians. Why are you here? We are here because of God. God is calling us to this place because all that we do is about God. As we look at this particular vision

of God, we can see that it has to be a Godly vision centered on God and the glory of God rather than people. We are here because of God.

The vision for life and faith can also be found in the passage from the Gospel of Mark as it redirects our attention and priorities to what is important for living faithfully.

Jesus had an interaction with a rich young man who wanted to know what he must do to **“... inherit eternal life?”** The Lord said to him ¹⁹**You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; honor your father and mother.’”**

The man reassured Jesus that he kept all of these commandments. However, the Lord knew more about the man’s heart and priorities because ²¹**Jesus,..said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”** This was a radical statement for it cut right to the man’s view and commitments to life.

²²**When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.** What must be stated here is that the Lord didn’t chase after the man because he chose the path and purpose for his life. Jesus knew that **“No one can serve two masters;...You cannot serve God and wealth.** [Matthew 6:24]

The Lord placed before the disciples a vision for the passions for which one lives and follows. Jesus said **to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!”** He spoke to the difficulty one would experience when one’s pursuits were contrary to the Lord’s way. The disciples asked who could be saved. ²⁷**Jesus...said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”**

God makes it possible for those who are called to enter the Kingdom of God and experience eternal life through Jesus Christ.

My dear brothers and sisters, keeping the vision of the Lord alive means that we will reaffirm our faith in the Lord and Savior who calls us into the future. He calls us to faith and courage. Life is full of opportunities, good or bad, joyful or painful, where we must always keep our eyes and hearts on the Savior. The confidence we have in the Lord sustains us through all events of life. That’s our vision; following Jesus Christ. God is always there and we just need to remind ourselves that the Lord is holding us.

So let us remember to embrace the Godly aspects of life and avoid the possessions or lust for power of this world that hold one back. Let us be bold in our faith as we move forward in serving the Lord with our hearts, minds and souls. Look ahead and move forward. And don’t look back.

The path ahead takes us to new opportunities of ministry and mission as well as to the renewal of our vision in the Lord’s care, service, love and hope. Let us keep a Godly vision out in front of us. Let us move into the future with confidence and with love.

May it be so for us. Amen.

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Supporting Scriptures:

Job 23:1-9 (NRSV)

¹Then Job answered:

²“Today also my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy despite my groaning.

³Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his dwelling!

⁴I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.

⁵I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me.

⁶Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; but he would give heed to me.

⁷There an upright person could reason with him, and I should be acquitted forever by my judge.

⁸“If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him;

⁹on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him.

Mark 10:17-31 (NRSV)

¹⁷As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸Jesus said to him,

“Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” ²⁰He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.”

²¹Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” ²²When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

²⁸Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

²⁹Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, ³⁰who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”