



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

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“Be Thou My Vision”

Proverbs 29:18a; Acts 1:8b; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:42-47

“God In My Life” – Pam Davis

[THANKS FOR PASTOR’S APPRECIATION SUNDAY LAST WEEK. TOOK CAKE TO TAHOE. JEALOUS!]

If you have been following the stock market for the last couple of weeks—it’s been the lead story on many newscasts—you know it’s had a wild up-and-down (mostly down) ride. Whew! And for those of us with pension funds, 401k’s or 403b’s, there is worry aplenty with all these changes. Change of any kind—even good change—is a source of stress. But this amount of change? Yes, there is a lot of stress across our land—and around the world—these days. What gets people through stressful times, difficult times, is a sense of meaning. Viktor Frankl, the Austrian psychiatrist imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp for years during World War II, fastened upon a literally life-saving insight from what he had witnessed: people die fast in horrible situations if they have no sense of meaning. They may literally have a heart attack or stroke, or they may just give up and wait for some form of death to overtake them. But, Frankl noted, “meaning” is a choice. Human beings have the freedom to choose how they interpret their circumstances.

The writer of Proverbs knew this, also. In Chapter 29 he wrote, “Without a vision, the people perish” (in the King James Version). Another way to say it is, “Without clear vision, people run amok.” Without meaning, without vision disorder and disintegration reign--in an individual’s life, in the life of a group, in the life of a society.

When our church began, we did not take time to work out an explicit vision, or listen to God very much. We knew the Scriptures—making disciples of Jesus is one of God’s favorite things. And I knew from my studies that starting a new church brings a spurt of growth in the Kingdom. So everyone involved here at the beginning had a general consensus about what we were doing—“starting a new church *for people like us*”. Some six years ago, we completed this building. And even as we started to use it—which was a joy, for many reasons—I became aware that we had run out of vision. That is, we had achieved what we set out to do. And from my studies, I learned that many churches drift and stagnate once they achieve their vision. So almost immediately, I began to talk about that. If “Act One” was “starting our church”, and we have a building to prove it, what will “Act Two” of our life together achieve?

So we started to listen to God more intently. We prayed. We read Christian authors. We read Scripture, especially the commands of Jesus. When we studied together Rick Warren’s book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, we stumbled across this line: “The ‘Great Commission’ and the ‘Great Commandment’ produces a great church”. The Great Commission, of course, is Jesus’ last words as Matthew records them in his chapter 28—very familiar. The passage ends this way, “Therefore, go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And

surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” This is what is known as “The Great Commission”.

Now, stop. This is so familiar that I’m not sure we really understand what Jesus said here. To “be baptized into the Name of” is not someone saying magic words and splashing or sinking you in water. “Check. Done.” No, it’s much more than that. To baptize you is to recognize a lived primary relationship you have with God/Jesus/Holy Spirit, the Triune God, the God whose very nature is relationship. Lean into that for a moment. Is that you? This is ‘way more than “membership in a Christian club”, isn’t it!

“The Great Commandment” comes from all three Synoptic gospels. Luke’s version goes this way: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind’; and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” The Great Commission plus the Great Commandment gives a great church.

So in the last couple of years, guided by God, we have fastened upon this Vision for our church, hereon-out: “Passionately Loving the Lord Jesus Christ, and Radiating that Love to Everyone”. This is the polished final version. The November *Chronicles* will carry a brief Bible study put together by Barb Dougherty that fleshes this out in an inspiring way.

In addition to this vision, we have hammered out four Mission Statements. The first is, “to Glorify God by Developing Committed Followers of Jesus Christ Who Will Attract Others to Him.” Said another way, it’s “disciples making disciples”, fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission.

But let’s be clear—we’re talking about becoming apprentices to Jesus, not just students or followers. As C.S. Lewis said, the purpose of the Church is to “make little Christs”. Paul says the same thing time and time again in his letters to the young churches. Apprentices learn skills in order to employ them more and more like their Master; inspired by the Holy Spirit, we become Christ-artists who look like Jesus. We are learning to know our Master and his skills so we can do more and more of what our Master said and did, BECAUSE WE PASSIONATELY LOVE GOD! This won’t work out of “duty”, or “to please someone important”. Duty and pleasing others focus on the wrong models. Only Jesus deserves to be “our first love”--emulated, loved, followed, copied like a child might copy a beloved parent or a mentor.

But becoming an apprentice of Jesus is not a “presto-chango” event or transaction; it’s a process, built on a living personal relationship with the Master. We are not in charge; He is. So there is what feels like a lot of waiting that is part of this process. There are things that just have to have time to grow in us—our hunger for God, our growing up and away from sin, our compassion for others. It’s frustrating to us because—once again, we’re not in charge. We’re not in control. We have given control of our lives to the Master, whom we love. We draw our strength from him and we have to learn to turn to him, listen to him, moment by moment. We draw our compassion from him, as we begin to look at others with his eyes.

Jesus’ disciples had to wait, too. They walked all over Israel with Jesus for three years. Then Jesus was murdered, and they thought it was over; they went into hiding, dazed and confused and afraid. But to their surprise and awe, Jesus was raised from death and into life. In one of his post-resurrection appearances, as Luke records it, he says to his disciples, “...I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Luke 24:29; Acts 1:8)

The disciples waited. It was perhaps 10 full days from the last of the Risen Lord's appearances until the day of Pentecost, in the Jewish Feast of Booths, which is 50 days after the high holiday of Passover. Then on that day, what Jesus talked about, what the Father promised—the Holy Spirit came to the hiding disciples, and they burst out of their upper room and started telling everyone about Jesus. With all the Jews in Jerusalem for the festival—from virtually all the regions of the then-known world—the disciples had an international audience. By the Holy Spirit's power, 3000 people responded to Peter's call to "repent from your assumptions about reality, and follow Jesus with us".

And these 3000, joining some 120 earlier Jesus-followers, didn't just "cross the line of faith". No, their lives were transformed. They virtually lived with these first followers of Jesus in homes throughout the City. Acts 2:42-47 tells it this way: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

These first disciples were making disciples who would attract still others to Jesus. That's The Great Commission. Their lives are transformed. Their relationships are revolutionized. They love God more than anything, and love their new neighbors as themselves—that's The Great Commandment.

And that's our Mission One, isn't it? (Do you see how God has been working in all of this?!) When the Holy Spirit of God inhabits our hearts, a vision made of mere words COMES ALIVE! We love God more than anything. We look at each other with "Jesus eyes", and we look with each other at a world of hurt, with God's love for those people, too. We have come to this Vision and our Missions by studying God's Word, listening for God's Voice in His Word, listening for God's voice in each other's voices, listening for God's responses as we ask, as we BEG God for His vision for us. We have taken time—some years, now—to be sure we hear rightly. This is God's business, and so we can assume it's going to take all the time it's going to take.

Now, let's bring this home to you. How are YOU doing at "loving God more than anything"?? Are you loving anyone outside your household as much as you love yourself?? Maybe it's time to stop "playing church", and pray as a church for God's help to live into the Vision and Missions God has given us. Are you willing to be willing to follow Jesus together?

If you and I were wanting to recruit new apprentices of Jesus, here are ways to do it:

First, there are seasonal opportunities with Thanksgiving and Christmas not far away. If you wanted to, you would make the most of these natural conversational opportunities to build ongoing relationships, and work on that in advance.

Second, as you let someone new into your life, and you step into hers or his, are you ready to tell about God in YOUR Life, like Pam did (and soon, Patty Thomas will)? Can you talk about God showing up; about relationships that changed you; about worship that makes you want to pursue God; about gratitude for salvation and commitment to serve with God's power?

If not, then please focus on that. How about taking 15 minutes later this evening, before you go to bed? Don't you love God more than anything? How can you help others understand?

In addition to the seasonal opportunities coming up, and the story of God showing up for you and/or people you know, there's a third way to pursue our Mission One, and this is the biggest reason to get together again this morning after our break. God has given some of you a passion for an activity, or a compassion for a type of person, and you can hardly wait to get an opportunity to do that thing, or meet those people. Well, what if that passion of yours is a message from God to you and to all of us *about a ministry that God is just waiting to bless?* Have you got something you just love to do, and would love to share? Please bring that to our Church Family Meeting this morning. Our leaders need to hear what you could bring, around which we could build a ministry. Please, don't hold back!

Please do return and join in this conversation. I'll bet we'll discover some surprises together. How great is that?! How much fun could that be?!

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on October 19, 2008, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]