

Why are we here and what are we doing? God tells us. The Bible is a book of God's vision for us, God's children and Christ's church. It is in the Bible that we discover who we are, what we are made of, and what we are called to do and can do in Christ.

Because there are so many examples of God's vision for God's people throughout scripture, ones we likely know well like the great commandment and great commission, for the sake of our focus and time, I thought it best to zero in on one example. This example is likely one we don't know, however, God's vision is underlined and boldly cast with the intention to empower and guide God's people.

### **Read Zechariah 9:16-17 and 10:6-7**

The story is told of three bricklayers working on the same job, each of whom was asked the question, "What are you doing?" The first responded, "I'm laying bricks." The second said, "I'm putting up a wall." The third responded, "I'm constructing a grand cathedral." All three were engaged in the same work, but only one had a vision for what he was really doing. "Without a vision, the people perish." (Proverbs 29:18)

These verses of prophecy underline God's vision for us, God's children and Christ's church alive today, as much as they did when Zechariah voiced it. Zechariah is only one of many prophets who envision a glorious future for the Church of the Lord. Using imagery of Israel's restoration, expansion, and prospering, the prophets looked ahead to the day of salvation (Christ's coming) and prophesied visions of what God intended to do in and through the people in the Church. God's purpose, as Zechariah 9 and 10 underline, is to create a strong and holy people who will fill the earth with a steadfast love of God and knowledge of God's glory.

The verses I read a moment ago in 9:16-17 speak of God's intention for the Church to be glorious, shining, and exalted. We get this image from Micah and Haggai and the Psalms as well. Perhaps it was what Jesus was teaching in Matthew 5:13-16, "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world."

I respect what one commentator offers, "God doesn't save the people only to leave them 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, the Church is 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. The church is also intended to rule, to leave an impression, wherever it exists, of the righteousness, peace, and joy of God's Spirit-ruled Kingdom."

The verses I read in 10:6-7 speak of God's call for the Church to aspire to greatness in God's name. God intends the Church 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 love and work of the Lord. God's vision for the Church is that of a great army, fully armed, well-disciplined, clear as to its mission, and filled with zeal for the battle. God will gather people from all parts of the world, and every neighborhood of our communities, in order to equip them for the work of the Kingdom.

After Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door and the birth of the Reformed Church erupted, it could be argued that this example of God's vision shared through Zechariah was captured and celebrated. In celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Christian Reformed Church, an artist was commissioned to make a painting reflecting the denomination's history. The painting consists of 150 faces of people who have had an impact on the church throughout the years. These faces are pictured behind a communion table with 12 communion cups, symbolizing the 12 apostles, and an open Bible, pointing to the importance of God's word. To the artist, the vision God had cast so many years before, the church had caught.

God wanted the Church (with a big "C" - meaning all of our little "c" churches united together- not just FPC alone but FPC joined with Peakland and St. Johns and First Christian and Holcomb Rock and Gospel Community and WC and 5<sup>th</sup> Ave and St. Simons and Duck and Bald Head and Venice and Burlington and Kalikumbi and Holca and Barahona) to be a place where the faces at the table are continually multiplying, where people from different backgrounds, who speak different languages, who appreciate different worship styles, can come together, and use their gifts in many ways. Perhaps this painting also helps us understand more clearly John's writing in Revelation 7:9, "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language," stands before God's throne.

God has cast a vision for us. However, it is said that catching the vision is ultimately more important than casting the vision. To catch the vision is to be aligned with the vision. Without alignment to the vision, you will not be able to move in the same direction and have the synergy to keep moving ahead through the obstacles. This act of alignment is critical. How do you know when people have caught the vision? The simplest test is this: those who catch the vision are able to cast the vision. They have moved from customer to salesman of the vision. They are actively involved in recruiting others. It is the freshly- recruited Andrew inviting his brother Peter to join with them.

Think of it like a relay from the outfield or ground ball double play. A player with the ball must throw or cast the ball to another player. The other player must align themselves with the thrown ball to be in a position to catch it. They must then catch the ball. With the play still going on, the player who has now caught it is now the thrower or caster. To complete the play, another player must then get into alignment with the throw and catch the ball.

What have we done lately to catch the vision? What are we doing today to catch the vision?

Many mighty warriors have sought to pave the way before us, but there is one highlighted in history that awakened the societal world with his shared vision and dream.

In August of 1964, under the backdrop of the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered the speech of his lifetime and perhaps the speech of his generation--a speech that served as the seedbed of social change. "I Have a Dream" was a capsulated summary of the dream Rev. Dr. King believed was God's to be implemented and experienced, and America was the place that dream could become a reality. Dr. King had caught God's vision and believed in God's Church in his time and into the future to relay that vision forward. How are we, as God's children and Christ's church today, doing with that?

We have examples of God's great army and mighty warriors all around us still today.

Examples of mighty warriors and great armies at work include the YAV (Young Adult Volunteer) program. Today is YAV Commissioning Sunday across the Church. The YAV program is a band of young adults from all around the world discerning their call in life and this program places them all around the world to help focus and motivate them to deeper understandings of community relationships, networks, and service. Alex Collier, Director of Outreach, says his YAV experience ultimately helped form who he is today and his understanding of God's vision for him to serve and care for others through community development. Each YAV makes up a part of God's great army at work.

Another example, at least in my belief, is Maui Strong. It is gut wrenching to think events like natural disasters and fires and such are what it takes to pull some of these stories to light. Call it what you will but I believe the sacrificial actions of those helping one another in Maui, treading water, putting their lives on the line to help another, are embodiments of God's great army at work.

All those who work toward the glory of God's kingdom and help illuminate and reveal the light of Christ are those who have caught God's vision in some way.

What will you do today to catch God's vision and recast it? What will I do? What will we do together?

"Now to God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to God's power that is at work within us, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

More examples of God's Vision Casting:

God's vision for us is outlined in Deuteronomy 6:5-9, a scripture text known as the *Shema*, which includes the great commandment to **"love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength."** The continuation of that text instructs us further to keep the commandments we have received from God (10 commandments) in our heart: **"recite them to our children and talk about them when we are at home or away, lying down or standing up. We are to bind them to our individual lives, our homes, and our property gates."**

God's vision for us is outlined in Micah 6:8 when it is declared that what God requires of us is **"to do justice (righteousness), love kindness (mercy), and walk humbly with God."**

God's vision for us is made clear by Jesus in the longer ending of the gospel of Mark 16:15 when Jesus tells the disciples **"Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."** This is echoed in what we have come to know as the great commission in the gospel of Matthew 28:18-20, **"Go, make disciples of all nations, 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."**

God's vision for us is also revealed in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount when he teaches, **"seek Ye first the kingdom of God and righteousness."** (Matthew 6:33) Jesus also teaches in the gospel of Luke 4:18-19 that we are to be like him and follow his example, **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."**

God's vision is revealed to us in Jesus' declaration in the gospel of John 15, **"Abide with Me!... for I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last...."**

Luke, in the book of Acts, casts God's vision for the early Church in Chapter 2:42-47, **"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (DISCIPLESHIP – Edify) and to the fellowship (FELLOWSHIP – Encourage), to the breaking of bread and to prayer (WORSHIP – Exalt). 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 (SERVICE – Equip). 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 (OUTREACH – Evangelism)."**

The apostle Paul carries on Jesus' teachings and God's vision for us when he charges the church in Ephesians 5:1, **"be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love..."** and Colossians 3:17, **"whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."**