

“Vision Sunday”

Acts 2:36-47 • Deuteronomy 6:4-13

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • February 7, 2016

Let me ask you something. Why did you come here today? Why are you here? Maybe you’ve been coming for years and it’s just kind of automatic. Maybe you’re here because someone else made you come. Most of you, I hope, are here for something bigger than that. Why are you here? How about a bigger question. What makes you keep coming back?

I recently sat down with the personnel committee for my annual review. We talk about how things have gone in the past year and where things should go in the coming year. At that meeting I shared with them why I’m here. What I told them was that I’m not here because I wanted to live in South Texas, although I enjoy living here. I’m not here because I’m paid a lot to be here or because it’s an easy job. I’m here because God has called me here. And I love that. I love the joy that comes from doing what He wants me to do. I don’t always do it well or joyfully. But I love serving Jesus in this church and it’s God’s vision for our church and our community that motivates me, a vision of what we could be and should be.

Just like an annual review, once a year as a church we stop to reflect on how things went the previous year, discuss what we could do better, and then plan for the coming year. And a big part of that is being reminded of our vision, God’s vision. It’s a reminder of why we’re here.

A vision, some idea where you’re trying to go, is important for any significant undertaking. The first time I visited Pittsburgh, a little over 10 years ago, I rented a car at the airport and headed out toward the seminary. I had no directions, only the address and a small map provided by the rental car company. It turns out that the street I needed was not even on that little map. When you’re trying to get somewhere, it really helps to know where we’re going and how to get there. Thankfully I had looked at a detailed map before leaving home so I had a general idea which direction to go and was able to make it safely.

It was a vision to transform Corpus Christi with the Gospel of Jesus that led seven people to form this church nearly 149 years ago. It was that same vision of reaching more and more people that led this church to build a larger facility 87 years ago. Sixty eight years ago it was a vision to bring quality education to Hispanic children that led a group of women from our church to start a Kindergarten at El Diviño Salvador Presbyterian Church, giving those kids a head start in school. That’s the same vision that led us three years ago to partner with an inner-city church, Crossbridge Fellowship, to help kids learn to read.

What’s our vision today? Why are we here? This morning to help us refocus our vision I want to invite you to look at our vision statement on the front of your bulletin. For many years, our vision, our mission has been to know Christ and to make Christ know. So I want us to look at each of these briefly.

First of all, our vision as a church, as followers of Jesus, is to know Christ. This is not the same as knowing *about* Jesus. It’s certainly possible to know *about* Jesus without ever knowing Him personally. Knowing Christ is about being in a relationship with Jesus. It means knowing everything you can about Him but it also means spending time with Him. When we say we want to know Christ, what we really mean is that we want to love Him. As we just heard from Deuteronomy 6, “You shall love the LORD your God, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” When you meet Jesus you discover that He *is* that God! What if your greatest joy, hope, and desire in life is to know Jesus better?

Second, we want to make Christ known. Following Jesus is not a private matter between you and God. When Jesus first began his ministry he was walking by the Sea of Galilee and he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew. The Bible says they were fishing because they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them,

“Follow me and I will teach you to fish for people.” Notice he didn’t say, “follow me and I will save you,” or “follow me and I will feed you.” Jesus said, “follow me and I’ll use you.” He is saying the same thing to you and to me. So think about this. What if we saw ourselves as a church that exists primarily for the sake of those who are not already a part of our fellowship? What if we planned and sacrificed and worked for the benefit of people outside. What if everything we did was outward-focused?

So that’s the knowing Christ and making Christ known. But over the past year as the Trustees and then the Session began seriously talking about our vision and mission, it occurred to us that we could support that statement without actually letting it affect us individually. We too easily see the answer in hiring professionals. If our goal is to know Christ, we hire a professional to tell us about Christ. If our goal is to make Christ known, we hire a professional to tell *other* people about Christ. But where in the Bible do you find that? Nowhere. Christianity is a team sport. So we added one little word. *Living*.

Living to know Christ and to make Christ known. The work of knowing Christ and making Him known takes place in the course of living. It happens every day – at work or school, at the grocery store or the fitness center. It happens when you intentionally live every day trying to know God better and share that with the people in your life. How? Both of our passages today show us clearly. Deuteronomy tells us, “these words that I command you shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them at home and at work and riding in the car, when you go to bed and when you get up.” In other words, read and meditate and talk about who Jesus is and what he asks you to do. As he said in John 14:15, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” Make loving Jesus and loving other people the primary focus of your life and watch what happens!

Finally, maybe you are thinking, “I like this vision of the church but I don’t know where to start.” Lucky for you we’ve made it easy for you. There are five practices that can help you to live to know Christ and to make him known and they’re on the front of your bulletin. We’ve talked about these before so this is just a reminder. First, worship often. When you worship God changes you. Second, connect with other believers. In our reading from Acts we saw that all who believed were together. They ate together, studied together, worshiped together, and served together. Third, work at growing your faith by learning God’s Word. Spend time every day with the Bible. Join or start a prayer group or small group Bible study.

Fourth, find some place to serve. The Missions Committee is now called the Serving Ministry and they will be providing opportunities on a regular basis for you to make a difference in people’s lives. And last, invite people into your relationship with Jesus. Start praying every day that God would lead you to someone who doesn’t know Him. If you already have someone in mind, start praying for that person every day. God answers prayer.

Here’s the last thing I’m going to say about this. This is not about guilt. It’s not about feeling bad about what you haven’t done or don’t do or can’t do. It’s about a relationship with the God who is madly in love with you. But all relationships take some effort. So try this. Start with one of the five practices. This week starts Lent. Come to worship every week for the next six weeks. The next week have lunch with someone else from the church. Each week add one more of the practices until they are all a part of your daily life. And then you will be living in such a way as to know Christ and to make Him known.

Amen