

WHERE THERE IS NO VISION

September 10, 2017 –Visioning Day –Acts 2: 17 & Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)

The Church of the Covenant

I remember the folks at First Pres in downtown Pittsburgh being very frustrated with their vision of youth ministry. They had extensively renovated at great cost what was called “The Cellar”. They had hired a fulltime youth minister. Their Christian Ed staff had a fulltime Pastor, a fulltime Youth Director and a part time CE Director but they only had 7 kids on the rolls of the church between middle school and high school. Even I didn’t want to cost factor that out, as in how much were they spending per kid? My standard joke was that perhaps we should just pass out \$100 bills on Sunday evenings and we’d get a heck of a lot more kids and it would cost a lot less. But every weekday afternoon the streets were full of high school students from the downtown high schools. CAPA was the school for creative kids for the performing arts. I could see them all roaming around the streets, like sheep without a shepherd, as the Bible would say. And every afternoon I would pray for them –that they would come to know the Good Shepherd –that they would come to love God –that their lives would be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. All the old tricks of youth ministry didn’t work anymore. One day in prayer I was led to contact Campus Life and ask them, “Would you be willing to do an urban Campus Life club if we could come up with the funding?” So they found a young 25-ish woman Campus Life Director who was very artsy, very low key and little shy, sort of was into wearing flowy, gossamer dresses and she with the help of her husband Frank were going to start a “Barista Ministry” in the basement of the church on weekday afternoons and serve coffee to the high school kids roaming the streets. (I actually remember one of the questions being posed to derail the idea was “will it be decaf or regular?”) Now old Pastor Curmudgeon, i.e. Stu, was kind of like “Wait, where are the fun and games? Where is the crowdbreaker? Where are the snacks? When will they go roller skating? How can they go to Kennywood?” Because old Dr. Curmudgeon, who had started out in youth ministry, was nostalgic for the past, had a particular matrix and thought in his brain of what a youth program was to be, and this Barista Stuff was absolutely not it. So with some skepticism we called Belle and Frank and began Barista Ministry. She recruited kids from the performing arts high school to play their instruments and sing; she did a juried art show at the Cellar; most of the kids began as anti-Christians but most came to receive Jesus as Lord. It was a rare weekday where there weren’t 25 to 40 kids hanging out in The Cellar after school. Thank you, Lord. You receive all the credit and all the glory! It was your vision, not mine.

I re-learned what the Lord has often had to re-teach me over the course of my ministry –WHEN THE VISION IS FROM THE LORD THEN THE PLAN WILL PRODUCE FRUIT FOR THE KINGDOM. But where there is no vision from the Lord, then the people perish...

Our two scripture verses are about vision. The first from the New Testament book of Acts where the prophet Joel is quoted –“*your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.*” (Acts 2: 17) In Old Testament times prophetic vision was reserved for the prophets and not given to the people. So a sign of the new covenant, the new thing God was doing through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, was that visioning was to be given to everyone in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. God would “pour out His Spirit on ALL flesh”. It was no longer just reserved to prophets, no longer reserved just to

pastors. God would plant holy vision through His Holy Spirit into the hearts and minds of regular people. But please note, its not some rehashed idea from 1980. Its not nostalgia. Its not I want the same thing for my kid that I had when I was their age. That's not vision from God –that's trotting out old ideas from the past that worked a long time ago. So visioning requires PRAYER. And visioning requires open-ness to what the Holy Spirit might speak. It requires open hearts and open minds, not closed, pre-concluded opinions. Visioning requires the Holy Spirit to move and the Spirit of the Living God to speak. That first Pentecost was the ultimate visioning day. Visioning Days where the Holy Spirit speak are a lot like that first Pentecost where the disciples gathered in prayer in an upper room. Speak, Lord, your servants are listening. Prayer, creative listening, seeking the vision from God not our own mind and our own thoughts. The second Bible verse is a lot like the first. It is from the Old Testament book of Proverbs. My dear Mother always quotes it because it was carved in stone over the stage of her high school auditorium. I quote it from the King James Version of the Bible: *“Where there is no vision the people perish.” (Proverbs 29: 18)* When our vision is from ourselves we will perish. Where we don't take the time to pray, when we are not open to the new thing God might speak, when we think we can just trot out tired ideas from the past and that's strategic planning, then we will wither away over time. We will perish without vision.

Because God provides for His vision. He provides people and energy and leadership and excitement. He provides financial means. He draws new people into leadership roles. WHEN THE VISION IS FROM THE LORD THEN THE PLAN WILL PRODUCE SPIRITUAL FRUIT FOR THE KINGDOM. There will be blessing and favor, there will be transformation, there will be changed and transformed lives, there will be people who understand who Jesus truly is and who seek to follow Him, there will be communities transformed by churches, there will be people transformed by the Holy Spirit, there will be a holy excitement about even just coming to church to see what God is doing. I want to come to church because I know something awesome is happening and is about to happen. The number one result on the survey on the CAT that you took the time to fill out was the desire to have new people come and new people be part of The Church of the Covenant. But attracting new people requires new vision. Attracting new people requires letting go of some of the tired ideas of the past. Attracting new people requires prayer and Holy Spirit visioning and having our young men and women dream dreams and not pour cold water on those dreams. Because without a holy vision –WHERE THERE IS NO VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH. And there are a lot of churches perishing out there today because their vision doesn't come from the Lord.

I'm going to stop my sermon, mid-sermon and truncate it in half right here. Because I want you to complete this sentence. WHERE THERE IS NO VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH. BUT WITH VISION FROM THE LORD...(dot, dot, dot)_____. And now you must fill in the blank; you must complete the sentence; you must come to visioning day at NOON in the Covenant Center to begin to discover with all of us together what the Lord's vision for The Church of the Covenant truly is...Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, Pennsylvania
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*