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Acts 26:15-23 – *Essentials of Renewal – Vision*

Preached at Trinity CRC

November 11, 2018

Intro to sermon series.

4 essentials of renewal: Abiding, Vision, Leadership, Health.

Vision:

What does our future look like as a church?

What do *we* want it to look like?

What does *God* want our future to look like?

Acts 26:15-23

¹⁵“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ¹⁶ ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

¹⁹“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.²¹ That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. ²² But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— ²³ that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

This is the Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Harry Reeder tells the story of man walking on a country road...

(Story of the moving bullseye)

This is a helpful way for us to think about vision...

Both individually and as a church.

When we talk about a vision for our lives, our families, or our church...

Do we have a target that we're aiming at?

Are we purposefully aiming our resources, our energy, and our arrows to where we want to go...

Or are we, like the young man, shooting randomly and then heading off in that direction?

Do we have an idea of where we want to end up?

Or are we kind of wandering through life hoping for the best...?

Hoping that we'll come close to God's target.

Because God does have a target for us...

He has a preferred future for our lives individually and for our church.

So we're going to talk about God's vision—

God's preferred future for us—

And to do this we're going to think of it as a target.

We're going to look at God's overall mission (larger target) and then the bullseye (our unique vision).

So first, God's overarching mission.

What is God's mission in this world?

If we look at the Bible as one big story...from Genesis to Revelation...

How would we lay out its plot line?

What would be the main point of the big story?

It's the story of how God loves his people and comes to rescue them in Jesus Christ.

We see this plot line develop and unfold in 4 movements:

1. First we see how God created this world...

He created it perfect and right...

Nothing was broken.

We were so close to God that we walked with him.

We didn't need things like money, prostitutes, pornography, cars, or a successful career...

To make us feel better...

To make us feel like we mattered.

We mattered because God created us and he loved spending time with us.

We knew this is where we belonged...

In this relationship with him.

In his presence is where we found love and life.

2. But in the second movement of the story sin comes into the picture...

Where we disobeyed God...

We made ourselves dirty and stained...

And we were no longer able to be in God's perfect presence.

We were estranged from our true love and our true life.

So that's why we turn to other things...

Because we're broken.

There's a connection that's missing inside of us.

It's that separation from God.

It creates a hole and a void inside of us...

And so we turn to other things to try to fill it...

Food, relationships, knowledge, sports, or addictions...

3. In the 3rd part of the story we come to the high point—redemption.

Where God does a major move in setting things right.

He sends Jesus Christ into the world...

To take on our sins...and to pay for what we couldn't.

On the cross he took the punishment that belonged to us.

He made it so that we could be back in right relationship with him.

This is the amazing grace that we sing about and praise him for.

This is how we know that God loves us...because Jesus gave up his life for us.

4. And finally in the last part of the story is a promise...

It's a promise that God will restore everything.

He's already redeemed us in Christ—

He has set in motion his plan for full-scale redemption—

And now we're waiting for this to come completely...

We're living in between the 3rd and 4th part of the story...

Between redemption in Christ and a total restoration of all that's broken.

We still live in a broken world, but we know that God has come to fix things through Christ.

God's vision—

God's mission in this world is to redeem everyone he's called...

And to restore everything he's created.

We see this vision coming out in the last verse our passage this morning:

“It's what the prophets and Moses said was going to happen: that the Christ was to suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, *to proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.*” (26:23)

This is God's grand vision:

That his people (both Jew and Gentile) would have their eyes opened to the saving work of Christ.

So that they would turn from darkness to light...

From the power of Satan to God...

And so that they would receive forgiveness of sin and a place in God's family.

If we painted a target on the barn it would encompass this overarching vision.

To rescue people from sin and death...

And to restore them to life all by the power of Christ.

Every arrow that we shoot...

All of our time, money, energy, prayers...

It should be aimed to hit this target.

This is the big vision that we're aiming for...

...transformation of lives and communities through Jesus Christ.

But now we hone in a little bit...

We move from the big vision to the specific or the unique vision...

What we're calling the bullseye.

For Paul this was a very *real* vision...

A specific vision from his encounter with the Lord.

Most of us probably remember Paul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9)...

Where the Lord appears to him and strikes him blind.

It's in *this* experience that Paul becomes a follower of Christ...

His eyes are opened and his life is transformed.

Now in our passage Paul is standing before King Agrippa telling about this experience...

But he's not highlighting his conversion like we see in Acts 9—

His transformation from Christ's enemy to Christ's disciple—

Paul is highlighting his commissioning...

The specific work that the Lord has in mind for Paul.

We can say that he's giving Paul a bullseye.

Christ commissions Paul as an apostle...

As one who is sent out into the world proclaiming the message of Christ.

This is the big target...proclaiming the message of Christ.

(Remember God wants to redeem those whom he has called...

And restore all he's created.)

But Paul's bullseye is to go especially to the Gentiles.

To those people who were previously excluded from the covenant.

It was Paul's unique vision to go to them in their cities and present the gospel message.

And if you've been tracking with our Acts' reading this is what he does:

He preaches in Ephesus at a lecture hall where Greeks hear the word of the Lord (19:10);

He preaches in Pisidian Antioch where a number of Gentiles believe (13:48);

This happens in Berea, Athens, Corinth, and all over the Mediterranean region;

And finally he carries the gospel message to Rome...the big city.
 All of Paul's arrows are aimed at the target God shows him.
 All of his energy, his passion, his suffering, his prayers, his preaching...
 It's all aimed at this vision God blesses him with.

God has a preferred future for Paul and God has a preferred future for us too.

He has a unique vision for our lives "individually."

There is a target that he wants us to take aim at...

No more random shooting of arrows...

Wasting our time, energy, and resources on things that are off target...

Things that don't contribute to God's mission.

The larger target is always the same:

Joining God in his work of bringing the message of Christ to the world...

But our bull's-eye—

That specific vision—is going to be unique to our place in life...

This is what we're called to discern.

So how has God equipped you to serve him at your work?

Are you one of only a handful of Christ-followers on your job site?

Has God designed you to be a patient listener as they ask questions and maybe mock the faith?

Has he given you a spirit of boldness to share God's word openly with them?

Maybe you work in a job where a big part of your mission to the world involves hospitality...

Where a friendly smile or a word of compassion goes a long way...

Where people who are hurt or depressed just need a place or space to feel safe...

Maybe this is the start of God's love entering their lives.

What about your neighbors?

Has God placed you among people who don't know Christ?

Is he calling you to spend more time here?

To get to know your neighbors...

Not just their names and their occupations...

But what they're passionate about;

Some of the struggles they have;

Some of the deeper issues they wrestle with;

Is God's unique vision for you right now to devote more of your resources here?

Is your bull's eye ministering to the homeless?

Is it going to young women with unexpected and unwanted pregnancies?

Is it ministering to those walking through drug, alcohol, or sex addictions?

Has God given you a target of reaching those who are intellectually astute?

Who need to argue out the faith and think about it logically?

How has God uniquely called and equipped you to participate in his mission?

So that eyes might be opened...and so that people might be turned from darkness to the light of Christ.

The Lord also has a unique vision for our church.

He desires that his whole Church witness to the love and grace of Jesus Christ—

Yes, this is his overall mission—

But how are we uniquely suited to do this in our context?

How has God specifically equipped us to communicate the gospel message to the Belvedere neighborhood?

God has us in *this time* and in *this place* with *these people* and *these resources* for a reason.

He has a specific vision in mind for Trinity...

Something that the Spirit only wants to work through Trinity Church...

And he wants us to take aim and shoot our arrows at this target...

Focusing on this bull's eye.

And what is this bull's eye?

This is what we have to discern.

We are a church of immigrants living in a community with an increasing number of immigrants.

Maybe God's vision is to use our experiences and our resources to open up relationships with them...

Sharing the love of Christ in tangible ways.

You know what it's like to move to a foreign land...

Moving away from family and friends with little money.

You know what it's like to struggle with a new language.

It's lonely; it's stressful; it's sad; and it's tough.

How can our experiences help them?

Trinity Church is all about family...

Maybe God calling us to welcome them into this family?

To serve not only as a place to play on Wednesday nights, but a place to find friendship, love, and community.

Maybe this is God's unique vision for us.

This is part of the work that we're doing as a church in the Renewal Lab process...

Discerning God's preferred future for us.

Our first step is listening...

Asking the question: "What is God's unique vision for Trinity?"

What do we hear our neighbors saying?

What do we hear the Spirit saying to us?

What does God's word say about God's mission?

And what are we saying about this unique vision?

What are our gifts as a church?

What is our passion as a church?

How does the Lord want to use us as his people?

People of God the Lord is working to redeem everyone he has called...

And he's restoring all he has created.

And in his grace he is using us...

He's inviting us to participate through the power of his Spirit.

He has a unique vision for our lives as individuals...

He has a unique vision for us as a church.

So let's discern his vision for us...

Taking aim at *that* target...

And shooting our arrows towards *that* bull's eye...

All for his glory and for the good of this world that he loves.

Amen.