

‘What’s Your Vision?’  
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based on Acts 16:9-15 and John 14:23-29

For you Star Wars fans out there... you may remember the scene from the *The Empire Strikes Back*...Obi-wan Kenobi appears to Luke in a vision...telling him to go to the Dagobah System. I guess it was the power of the force that helped Luke find the one particular planet out of the billions of other planets in the Dagobah system.

From there Luke learns about the power of the Force from Yoda...but ends up abandoning his training to be a Jedi to go save his friends from the evil Darth Vader.

It is then Obi-wan returns in a vision to advice Luke not to “give into hate...that leads to the dark side.”

Mark Twain once said there’s no such thing as a new idea...just re-working existing ones. So I don’t believe for a minute George Lucas made up the idea of a man appearing in a vision to guide someone...he simply re-used an existing concept from Acts 16:9-15!

Star Wars’ visions are a Hollywood version of visions... today we use a Hollywood image to imagine divine visions, but not all divine visions (actually probably very few) are as vivid as Hollywood visions.

Hollywood ‘vision’ you see with your eyes...but a divine vision is more often something you see with your heart and mind.

I’m not sure how common visions are, but I do know the important thing about visions is that if you’ve experienced them...don’t brush it off...but act on it.

Example: Oprah Winfrey had a vision as a young girl to be a teacher and she wanted to be known for inspiring students to be more than they thought they could be. But what hadn’t been revealed to her at that time was that vision included being on television...and not in a traditional classroom.

Oprah’s vision inspired her to be a teacher...but didn’t necessarily show her the exact way to fulfill the vision...which ended up being through the television medium.

I believe we have all probably experienced some kind of vision in our lives...but perhaps we didn’t live into it because we either brushed it off or perhaps was the vision was so vague we had no idea how to respond to it....so we gave up in favor of something more immediate...more tangible...more *safe*.

After all, how would we plot our course to the Dagobah system not knowing which planet was the right one? That kind of question could stall the whole vision!

That is when we violate the vision. When we get stalled out by so many unanswered questions and not simply trust the vision.

Many of you, I know, over the years have been involved in helping this congregation develop and draft a vision statement.

It is long tedious work because it requires a lot of introspection...and it necessitates looking internally at the way the church functions.

Searching for a vision the church may have brushed aside over the years requires us to search deep into the congregation’s DNA.

The church is like a living organism. An organism with a bit of each one of us gathered here today *and* those from the past.

DNA, as you know, is as small as a molecule that carries instructions used in the growth, development, and functioning of all known living organisms.

...and so how does a living organism as diverse as a faith community embrace a vision that can adapt to the DNA that causes us to grow, develop, and function in ways that honors the vision?

Usually after months of gathering to talk about vision; and to talk to many people; and pick the most very perfect words to describe the vision...what happens???

The vision dies...it goes back to being brushed aside. The vision doesn't grow, develop or function because we don't live into it.

Why is that???

My guess is that we don't live into it corporately because we don't adopt it individually. We may accept it literally and don't incorporate it creatively.

A vision can be a very personal thing. Even though it is tailored to; and is born out of a congregational DNA it still requires deliberate, intentional, dedicated, individual responses.

Today we read two scripture readings: One from the early church and travels of Paul and Silas...and another from the final weeks of Jesus' ministry.

In the reading from Acts, I envision in my mind a ghostly figure that looks oddly like Obi-wan Kenobi pleading with Paul to come over to Macedonia and help them. Paul doesn't give the vision a chance to die but immediately responds. They proceed to travel across the Aegean Sea to Neapolis and then walk miles to Philippi...a leading city of Macedonia.

Macedonia isn't a city...it's an area of Asia Minor...Paul's vision didn't instruct him exactly what to do, where to go, not even exactly what city to go to!

Paul did not give up on the vision.

In Philippi they hang around for a few days until the Sabbath and then go down to the river to pray...finding a woman named Lydia (a dealer in purple cloth) who was so intrigued by Paul's testimony she's converted on the spot...along with her entire household.

This was such a strong conversion experience Lydia insists Paul and Silas stay at her home.

Now that's some vision with quite an amazing outcome! All that from just a plea to come to Macedonia to help. Paul took the vision and ran with it. (literally!)

Here's what I learned about visions from that story:

The thing about visions...is they die if you don't respond to them...and you have to trust the vision...and be creative and adaptive about it.

Visions aren't static...from this story in Acts, it appears as though you have to keep adapting to them and be open to what the vision might reveal. That makes sense since God is in a constant state of creating...as individual Jesus followers and as a community of faith...we need to continually adapt to those changes in God's creation.

Visions aren't make-believe. They aren't Hollywood props. Visions are God's way of communicating to us about God's ongoing creative process.

Jesus is God's way of helping us understand God's vision...a divine vision that inspires people to be more loving; to share with others; to seek justice in an unjust world.

Saint Paul continued that vision by teaching others about Jesus' vision that wasn't just for some people...but for all people.

Covenant has a vision...at least I think it does.

Some of you may think the 'Gather, Grow, Go Forth' methodology is just a set of clever words...but what's embedded in those words is really at the heart of who we are called to be as a community of faith.

I believe it is how we, as a church, will live into Jesus' vision.

And what I learned this week as I thought about visions...is that our Gather, Grow, and Go Forth vision is as risky and vague and wonderful as Saint Paul's vision in Troas. The only difference is that Paul didn't brush the vision aside and sets out to seek ways to live into God's call coming from the vision.

...and I am personally claiming that as one of my faults, not yours. I realized this last week there have been times over the last few months I have brushed aside the vision. No more.

I believe Gather, Grow, Go Forth is our corporate response to God's call or vision. It is risky, vague...and adaptive IF we choose live into it.

Does it answer every question? No.

Do we know exactly where to go? No, but God knows.

Do we each one have a vision? I believe so!

You have a vision! What is your vision? What drives YOU? What do you value so much that you are willing to work to create it?

*How does your vision pair with our church's vision?*

As Christians, and as people who make the effort to come to church most Sundays...I'm going to assume what your value is related to your faith in Jesus Christ.

How does that value translate into you acting on your vision?

Here is *my* personal value that I see pairs well with Covenant's vision:

This is the vision I experienced as a young girl. I don't think I realized it at the time...but it is a vision I've seen over and over again as a young adult and to this day.

The value I see in my vision is the act of **sharing**. Acts of sharing the truly important things in life. Over the years I've found sharing those important spiritual values is how I live into Jesus' teachings.

Like Oprah Winfrey I didn't know until later in life that included ordained ministry...I just knew I needed to share that hate leads to the dark side and love leads to light.

Look at those scripture readings again:

Saint Paul had a vision...he goes to Macedonia to *share* the good news of the Light found in Jesus Christ. He does it to help others to also believe in Jesus' divine vision.

I've often wondered what it was Paul said to Lydia to convert her to being a Jesus believer so quickly...and after today I think it was very similar to what Obi-wan Kenobi said to Luke: "hate leads to the dark side". Love leads to the source of power that resist all evil.

Paul used those words because he learned from Jesus. Jesus *shared* God's love with people in such a way lives were transformed into following the truly important things in life...to follow the light and love of God to make the world a better place for all.

How are WE going to respond to our vision?

1. Adopt it individually; act on it corporately.
2. Be creative about how to live into it.
3. Get up, get moving, and trust the one who appears to us in our hearts saying: “Gather.....Grow.....then, Go Forth.”

What’s YOUR vision?