

Dreams and Visions

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Nehemiah 2: 1-8

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“So I say to you, my friends, that even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

“I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.”

“I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation when they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!”

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.”

“This is our hope. This is the faith that I will go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.”

“With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream. What I just read were excerpts from his famous speech, “I Have a Dream,” which he delivered before the Lincoln Memorial on the 28th of August 1963. This was the keynote address of the March on Washington for Civil Rights. His speech was televised, so the entire nation was affected in one way or another by these profound words. His wife, Coretta King, once commented, “At that moment it seemed as if the Kingdom of God appeared. But it only lasted for a moment.”

King’s dream was a good one. I might even go so far to say that I believe King was a modern day prophet of God. I think he had more than just a dream. He had a vision. He preached and practiced equality and justice. He lived, ate, and slept with what he believed, and was an excellent example of a servant leader, as he led thousands to make changes within the Civil Rights Movement. Equality and justice—are those not messages from God that we all are to live by every day?

In a book I read called *Visionerring* by Andy Stanley, the author talks about dreams and visions for our churches today. Actually, the author talks more about visions than dreams.

Did you know there is a difference between a church having a dream and a church having a vision? **Dreamers are content to wish things were different; visionaries seek ways to partner with God to make a difference.** There's not much action involved in dreaming. We've all daydreamed before, I'm sure, and that doesn't take much energy, does it? "A legitimate Christian vision, though, isn't just daydreaming or positive thinking or fuzzy guesses; real vision grows out of **Jesus'** dream of God's kingdom on earth. Stanley said in his book "just about every God-ordained vision appears to be impossible. A true vision will be so large and challenging that the power of God is required to fulfill it."

Let's look at Nehemiah from our Old Testament reading for today. I think Nehemiah was another true visionary, and not just a dreamer. Nehemiah was a Jewish exile who was an official in the court of Artaxerxes I in Susa—or Persia. He was the official cupbearer, the man who would bring the King his cup and take a taste before the King did. That way, if there were poison in the cup, it wouldn't be the King who drank it. It was an important position to hold.

This story takes place at the end of the exile of the Jewish people. They had been forced to leave their home of Jerusalem, and live in captivity, and were now in the process of moving back.

One day, Nehemiah received a message from one of his brothers who had traveled to Jerusalem and was now back in Susa. He told them of the trouble their people were experiencing there, and that the wall that had once surrounded the city to protect them had been torn down. The Jews in Jerusalem were now left very vulnerable, subject to attack. Nehemiah became very upset when he heard this news. He spent some time mourning, and weeping, and praying, then he got down to business.

Notice that Nehemiah never prayed for **God** to rebuild the wall. What he prays for is an **opportunity** to go rebuild it himself. This is one of the things that made Nehemiah a visionary and not just a dreamer. Dreamers dream about things being different, visionaries envision **themselves** making a difference. Dreamers think about how nice it would be for something to be done; visionaries look for an opportunity to do something.

So what do Dr. King and Nehemiah have in common? Well, both had dreams that became visions—visions that were lived out in their actions and in the community's actions; actions that made a difference in people's lives.

So what about us? Does our congregation here have anything in common with two such great men? Are we visionaries or just dreamers? Do we have a God-ordained vision for this church?

Proverbs 29:18 states, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Keep in mind what I said about visions before: Just about every God-ordained vision *appears* to be impossible. A true vision will be so large and challenging that the power of God is required to fulfill it.

God has done wonderful things in this congregation over the last 129 years, but I believe God wants to do even greater things in the future of this

church. We need a God-given vision for this to happen. What is our vision? Do we have a vision of what kind of church we want to be for the world and our community?

The Session will be looking at the church's vision for the coming year, then, the next logical step is to set some goals. A vision shows us where we want to be; goals help us to get there. The new committees we have in the church will be setting these goals for the coming year in their meetings, which will begin soon. If you are not a part of one of these committees, please consider speaking to one of the moderators of the committees so you can be part of the vision of this church. You can find the committees and their moderators on the back of the bulletin.

Visioning involves stepping out in faith in a direction that may be new to a lot of you. This can be scary work. Always present is that fear of failure, that fear that we are going to invest our time and emotional energy, and that nothing will happen. Buy you know what? The only people that never fail are the ones who never attempt anything new. Success comes to those who are willing to risk failure and to find new ways of accomplishing great things.

A reporter once asked Thomas Edison how it felt to fail in his current venture (pun not intended)—the invention of the light bulb. He had experienced failure of one method or another over 10,000 times. Edison replied, "Young man, I will give you a thought that should benefit you in the future. I have *not* failed anything 10,000 times. I have successfully found 10,000 ways that will *not* work."

It may take us here at FPC trying 1000's of different ways to be the church God wants us to be—we will probably fail at some of our attempts. But when we, as Dr. King and as Nehemiah saw—when we see our vision as a God-ordained vision, when each one of us claims this vision for ourselves and for our church, I believe God will provide the resources and the strength to fulfill our vision.

In reading many of Dr. King's speeches and sermons this last week, I read that when he talked about his faith, it was always in a way the included everyone. King talked about himself as a man trying to do things, with God's help, and he invited all of us to try, too.

I extend that invitation to you again today. Let's discover our vision and live into and work with God on that vision of a future for the ministry here.

Believe that God can and will use **you** not only as a congregation, but individually to significantly impact the lives of the people in this community and in the world.

May we not be content to be just dreamers. In this coming year, I pray each one of you will seek ways to partner with God as we discover God's vision for us in this congregation.

Amen.