

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

The Very Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Dean

Scripture: Various

"Where's the Vision? & What's the Mission?"

A TOUGH QUESTION

On Friday I went to Roswell to visit one of our members who was having surgery. As I got into the elevator, another gentleman in his thirties joined me. As I was about to leave the elevator, he looked up and asked me, "How do I restore my belief in God?" I hesitated briefly and said, "That's a tough question, but I would keep an open mind, seek after the things of God, and look for other believers." I also told him to read the Gospel of John and the Psalms and Proverbs. I was in hurry to see our member before they would go into surgery so I could not say much more but afterwards I thought I should have done more.

Has anyone ever asked you that question before? What would you say? Have you ever asked that question? One thing to look at is why you lost your belief in the first place. I am not sure what the young man was going through but it probably was related to his own health or the health of a loved one. When we are confronted by sickness or tragedy, it will cause us to question what is most important in life and why do such things happen and how do I deal with them? Certainly, this past week has been a tough one, especially for the folks in Orlando. On Saturday singer, Christina Grimmie, who was also a Christian, was shot in the back of the head by a crazed gunman. The next day, there was the mass shooting at a bar which killed 49 people. And then a couple days later, a young two-year old boy was snatched and drowned by an alligator. Such events can shake our faith, especially if you are directly involved.

And then there is the presidential election and the turmoil in Washington, DC. Have you ever seen so much dysfunction and discord in the political process or in government? You would have to go back to before the Civil War to find such acrimony. Why has it come to this? What is the answer to our nation's ills and to a weak faith? The only answer is God and specifically His Son, Jesus Christ.

TAKE COURAGE

In **Jn. 16:33**, Jesus said on the night before He died, "***In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world.***" In other words, there will be some bleak times and dark days in life, but we are not to lose heart or faith; but instead we are to take courage. Why? Because things are simply going to get better? No. Because Jesus has overcome the world and all that is wrong with the world, and in Jesus we can overcome too.

Now, the key is not just found in knowing Jesus Christ; it is embracing His vision for our world, and that means for us as individuals, as a community, as a church and as a nation. Why is our nation in such turmoil? Why is there so much dysfunction in our world? There is no godly vision.

FATHERS AND VISION

Today is Father's Day. We not only honor our dads but we remember that, like motherhood on Mother's Day, fatherhood is a gift from the Lord. It is essential for the well-being of a family and therefore for the greater community and the world. Fathers provide the backbone of protection, accountability, and

leadership a family needs. Fathers are called by the Lord to be the spiritual head of the family, not that they are more important than moms but that they are responsible for making sure that the family is not only taken care of physically, but spiritually. Dads are called to lead in the way that Christ leads – servant leadership. Leadership by example. Leadership through consistency and discipline. And leadership with a godly vision.

You see, if you are leading someone, you need to have a vision. In fact, as Christians we are called to be leaders in society. Jesus called us to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Light shows us the way, and salt preserves and flavors but it is also a catalyst for heat. Leadership means vision. All of us need to have a vision in life.

Now what is a vision? A vision is something that you want to see happen in your life and those around you. That is a vision. So if someone asks you what your vision is, what are you going to say? What do you want to see accomplished in your life? What do you want to be true about your life? What do you want to be true in the life of others? That's vision.

Now what does the Bible have to say about vision in general? Please turn with me to **Proverbs 29:18**. We read, "*Without a vision, the people are unrestrained. But happy is he who keeps the law.*" Now in the Hebrew this means a prophetic vision and more specifically God's revelation. In other words, without God's revelation, and recall His Word is His revelation, *the people are unrestrained* – meaning they will be out of control morally and spiritually. If people are not following God's vision, His direction, there will be lack of godly focus; and this will result in bad behavior.

A FAILED VISION AND MISSION

Now let's think about this for a moment. I want you to reflect on what is going on in our nation now. There is no godly vision being put forth. You know seven years ago our President did put forth a vision. It was hope and change. That was the vision and it inspired millions of our citizens. There was going to be hope and there was going to be change. But we have seen that this vision has failed. Why? If a vision is going to become a reality, there also must be a mission. The mission is what accomplishes the vision. So for example, in **Proverbs 29:18**, if you don't want to see moral chaos, then you not only need to know God's vision, but you also need to know and keep His mission, which is to obey His law. And if you obey God's law, (ie. do the mission) then the vision will be accomplished as well. You will not only be morally upright but you will be happy – there will be contentment and peace rather than discontentment and discord in your life.

And so why did Obama's vision fail? Because his mission failed. He was going to bring hope and change and how was he going to do it? By bringing both parties together to work on the most pressing issues facing our nation; but what actually happened? He did not work with the Republicans on health care reform but forced Obamacare down their throats, causing great furor, thereby causing the Democrats to lose both the House and the Senate and causing further government intransigence. And now we have more animosity in our nation than since the 1960's.

THE VISION AND MISSION OF THE LORD

So what is the answer? We are to catch God's vision for ourselves, our families, our church and our world. Where do we find God's vision? – in His Word. What's the vision? The Kingdom of God. What is a Kingdom? It literally means the "king's domain." What is the King's domain? Wherever the King reigns? Who is the King of God's Kingdom? Jesus Christ. So how do we see the Kingdom of God in our lives? Through knowing Jesus Christ.

And then how is this vision accomplished? By doing the mission. What is the mission? Jesus gave us the mission - **Matthew 28:19-20: "Go make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."**

The Apostle Paul further clarifies what the Kingdom of God looks like and how we are to see that vision in our lives through what we do when he writes in **Ephesians 4:11-13: "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."**

What is the vision of the above passage from Ephesians? Building up the Body of Christ and spiritual maturity in Christ. How will the vision be fulfilled? By the mission. What is the mission? The leadership of the church equipping the laity of the church for the work of ministry and service. So as members are equipped to do ministry, then others will be impacted and come to Christ and *grow* in their relationship with Christ. So it is another way to express the Vision of the Kingdom of God and the mission to make disciples.

Now God has intended His creation to be diverse. It is incredibly complex and varied but there is a unity to it all. We know from biology that if you remove one living organism in an ecosystem it affects everything else. Every organism has a role to play. Here at St. Bartholomew's we are one of millions of "little Bodies of Christs" that make up THE Body of Christ. We come out of the Anglican tradition of Christianity – Catholic but also Reformed. We came from the Roman Catholic Church but through the lens of the Protestant Reformation. As a result, we have a unique contribution to make to the Body of Christ and the world. And yet, we are not first Anglicans; we are first Christians. We don't follow a particular Church or Pope, but we follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

As many of you know, we have been going through a discernment phase in which we want to really evaluate our purpose and mission as an Anglican Church in the Town of Tonawanda and Western New York. We have looked at our strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and challenges that are before us. We have analyzed our demographics internally and externally (the surrounding community), all with the focus of developing a vision that will be the central emphasis of why we are here and a mission to accomplish the vision.

OUR VISION AND MISSION

After months of prayer and discussion, the Core Team has produced a vision statement and mission statement for our church. It is grounded in the Holy Scripture and in Jesus Christ. It reflects the Great Commission but in a way that will highlight what we will be about specifically as Christ's Church. It has the endorsement of our bishop and our vestry. I would like to now present it. Note that this vision and mission statement will be on most of our church's publications and will be the basis for all the ministries of the church. In essence, it will be what we are to be about as members of St. Bart's.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S VISION STATEMENT: *"To see lives transformed through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ."*

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S MISSION STATEMENT: *"To share Christ's love and His word with our community and the world through Christ-centered outreach, worship, prayer, and biblical study."*

Some may ask why such statements are important. Isn't the Great Commission enough? The truth is, it is important that we personalize the Great Commission and have the vision for our church in the forefront so that we can understand why we are doing what we are doing and so that we can tell others. In addition, the mission statement gives us the parameters for accomplishing the vision. It highlights what is most important to us as St. Bartholomew's.

A LESSON FROM FOOTBALL – REALLY ALL TEAM SPORTS

Dallas Cowboys coach Tom Landry was one of the most successful coaches in NFL history. He led the Cowboys to five Super Bowls, winning two. Every year during the first days of football training camp he would ask the new recruits the question, "What is football about for you?" Some would say they did it for the money, and others for the accolades of the crowds. Still others would say, they did it to show their football skills. To which Coach Landry said, "That is not what football is about for the Dallas Cowboys." What football is about is winning games and championships. If you want to play football for the Cowboys, you need to put away what you think football is about for you; and you need to think about what football is about for the team, and that is to win games." And then by the end of training camp, when each player who made the team was asked again what football is about, the receivers would say my role is to catch the ball when it is thrown to me so we can score and win. The offensive linemen would say mine is to protect the QB and open holes for the running back so that we can win. The QB would say football is about throwing accurate balls so that my receivers can catch them and score TDS. In other words, football was no longer about what was in it for the individual player; it was about the team and the mission of the team.

The call for every church and its members is to know the vision and mission of their church, and then to ask, "*What is my role* in accomplishing the mission of our church so that our vision can be fulfilled?" My challenge to all who hear and read this sermon is to look over the vision and mission of our church, to pray over it, and to ask God how you can be engaged in the mission of St. Bartholomew's so that God's vision of His Kingdom and life transformation through Jesus can be experienced by our world! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!