



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Wishes, Dreams, and Visions

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Psalm 19:7-14

1 Peter 2:1-10

As we begin this new year and as we make our resolutions, I offer to you our reading from the Psalms as an addition to your resolution list: *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”*

What if that topped your list of things to do every day this coming year? The way I see it is that if we could do that, then we would be fulfilling God’s resolution for you and me as Peter writes in his letter: *“To be God’s own people, in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

That’s the starting point for this sermon as we consider where we are: as a congregation who will be seeking a new pastor; and each of you, as a living, breathing child of God who is looking to see God at work in his or her life.

And I want to frame these thoughts around the words of ‘wishes, dreams, and visions.’

The Bible is pretty clear about visions; in fact, we are told that ‘where there is no vision, the people perish.’

So, having a vision is serious business if you are to live the faithful life. Visions are a clear and focused image of what God would have us do, would have us be, would have us think.

First of all, I want to be clear that visions are not to be confused with wishes and dreams. A wish is something you

and I would like to see happen, but it's something beyond our ability to make happen.

I worked with a Type A Pastor Nominating Committee. When I first met them, I told them I imagined they wanted somebody for the upcoming Sunday; "No, we wanted them last Sunday!"

That was 'wishful thinking', and when we bring this kind of mentality to faith, we have what I call 'star-light, star-bright religion.' Because once you wish for something impossible for you to make happen, the responsibility for the magic needed to make the wish come true is given to some far-off object: "Star light, star bright, how I wish upon a star tonight..."

And in faith, that comes out like this: "God, I wish everybody would see things my way; I wish we could fill up this church every Sunday..."

God is that far-off object, and we've given it to God and that's where it ends. Because wishing is safe; it doesn't cost us anything. That means you don't really get emotionally involved; and if you don't get emotionally involved, you don't invest much of yourself in turning that wish into reality.

Now dreams are a little bit different. A dream is also an image of something a person would like to see happen. But it's different from a wish because people do get emotionally involved in their dreams.

Yes, dreams in the Bible are often vision-like, but the kind of dreams I'm talking about are things like a dream job or dream house or dream date, or in our case here, a dream candidate for your pastor.

I'm sure each of you have dreamed about the perfect candidate. Maybe something like this:

- 25 years old with 50 years' experience
- can preach the whole Bible in a 10-minute sermon
- always out visiting the homebound or at the hospital or working in a mission, but available in the office at all times to make sure the church is running smoothly
- dedicated to family time, but at the church every night for some meeting and all day Saturday working on the sermon
- you get the picture...a DREAM.

We feel our dreams, and we can get excited about them thinking they might come true.

And this is where visions differ from dreams and wishes. Wishes and dreams are safe because we don't have to get involved. But vision, as the Bible speaks about it, are created by the divine reality, greater than you or me: visions come from God. As someone said, "Visions are a lover's embrace by God; they catch hold of us, they won't let us go." That means when a vision has hold of us and won't let go of us, we are all in for God's purposes...it's the heart, soul, and mind all working together for God.

And that brings us back to where we began: a resolution to focus on God's word, God's way of life for you, to be God's people, to value that vision more than anything else. Because let me tell you, that's what the sign says outside this sanctuary: Westminster Presbyterian Church – A Community of Faith.

Can we be powered by that vision, that story, that truth to push ourselves forward, to work that vision into reality, day after day, to be God's own people, a community of faith?

Yes, there are competing visions for our country, our communities, our churches, and it's easy to complain and throw our hands up in despair. Yet we have a calling to direct our lives toward living the values as God's people for the world in which we live. The question is why we waste our time and energy worrying ourselves and troubling others about things that don't matter that much.

As the people of God, we see the world in all its rock solid reality of terror and troubles, of lies and manipulations, of the never ending rumblings of war; but then we look a little further, and we push forward with a great and shining vision that has been given to us by God.

Our actions will speak louder than any words because where there is vision, there is life and growth, accomplishment and joy.

That's what Peter is trying to tell his community of faith. The mystery and miracle of the church is that God chooses ordinary and fallible people like you and me to be the church, and the church is holy and precious because God has chosen to love the church.

That through what has been accomplished in Jesus Christ, the church is indeed a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

This is the true vision for this church. We see glimpses of this reality among us in those priestly ministries that help to make known Christ's presence among the distressed and oppressed; we see it in those who sit beside a hospital bed or offer a helping hand in times of trouble; we see it in those who lead our children and young people to delight in the love of Jesus; we see it in prayers said for those within and outside this church; we see it as we seek to be God's

Wishes, Dreams, and Visions

peacemakers and justice-doers and mercy-givers; we see glimpses of the reality of the royal priesthood.

So, as we prepare to ordain and install Deacons and Elders for this church, and as they take vows to serve us and lead us as they join others on the Board of Deacons and Session for this community of faith, I think about the words of a prayer that summed up one church's vision for their community to be God's people: *To make the door of this church wide enough to receive all who need human love and fellowship and your divine care; and narrow enough to shut out envy, pride, and hostility...to make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling block to children, to weak or straying feet; but rugged enough and strong enough to turn back the tempter's power...to make the door of this church a gateway to God's eternal kingdom... and daily increase by the Holy Spirit to live Jesus Christ's love and service to others...*

Not a wish, not a dream, but a vision.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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