

“Vision and Hope Are Heart Inspirations” – Matt. 6:25-33 – Rev Jeff Childs

1. Everyone has a point of view. Some look forward, some look back. The prophet Joel had a vision that was repeated by Peter at Pentecost; *After that I will pour out my spirit upon everyone; your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.* (Joel 2:28) Charles Schulz has enlightened us with his cartoon “Peanuts.” With their own special brand of charm, his comic characters often provoke laughter and also pause for thought. Once when Charlie Brown sought psychiatric advice from Lucy, she told him simply that life is like a deck chair on the cruise ship of life. “What you have to decide,” Lucy said, “is whether you want your deck chair to face backward so you can see where you have been, or if you want you can set your deck chair to face forward so you can see where you are going.” Exasperated, Charlie Brown responded, “I’m having trouble just getting my deck chair unfolded!”

We are a blessed congregation today with our deck chairs facing forward. This week, our Heart Card has caused us to give some thought to what we see ahead; to describe one or two things we would like to see happen in our church, which contributes to fulfilling our God-given mission. The prophet Joel offers direction for us, as we consider our vision of the church. Vision comes about as God inspires people to prophesy, dream and have visions. What has God inspired you to envision for the coming year? I would offer this for you to ponder, “As a church our income will affect our outcome!” Just as it takes more gasoline to climb uphill than to drive on the level or coast downhill; it takes more effort and energy to grow a church and its ministries than to plateau or decline. Unlike what I preached 2 weeks ago, perhaps in this area of our stewardship, we do get what we pay for. As we envision our church in 2025, I trust our giving of time, talents and treasures will fuel our growth for God’s kingdom.

2. Resurrection faith is uplifting. Colossians instructs us to set our hearts on things above. *Therefore if you were raised with Christ, look for the things that are above where Christ is sitting at God’s right hand.* (Colossians 3:1) Where are we headed? In this letter to the early church there is a vision which was higher than it was when it was written and first read. Paul called the church to envision a brighter future, one in the glorious reign of God. When we celebrate the lives of the faithful at their funerals, we not only recall the faithful life they have lived, but we also give thanks for the promise that life does not end here. Our resurrection faith calls us to a higher calling - an eternity of glorifying God.

Let me put this scripture into context of the first century church. People were coming to the faith and changing their lives. In the waters of baptism and by the liturgy used, they understood they were dying to their old way of life and, coming up out from the water, they were drawing their first breath in a new life of resurrection with Christ. For some a “Christian Name” would be given which was different from their old name. Even a hundred years ago children would not be named when they were born, or even before they were born, but only when they came to church to have the child baptized and the pastor asked, “What name is given to this child?” If you go into the old parts of cemeteries, you may find graves just marked, “boy” or “girl” because they died before being baptized and had not been named at the time of their death.

So, I ask again, where are we headed as individuals and as a church? We are headed towards Jesus who leads us towards the throne of God. As a community of faith, we dare to dream of becoming what God wants us to be no matter how challenging or difficult. We look up and keep our eyes on Jesus. The one who was raised up will lift us up, if we keep the faith and keep moving forward. Today I not only ask you to dream and envision a future for this church, but to plan to invest in the future of this church to help make that happen.

3. Putting God first. Matthew's Gospel sets our personal and community priorities. *Desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* (Matthew 6:33) What limits have you placed on your generosity? Can fear and worry change one thing in your life? Let me read the full context of this verse in the middle of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount starting with verse 25. Together in community, we help one another to seek God first in all things, to strive for righteousness, or right standing, with God over fears or anxieties. We put our faith in God rather than putting our doubts into fears. These verses give us the starting place for understanding what God has called us to do and be as a church in the coming year. An old adage was, "Just wait until our ship comes in!" Well, it has come in and we are the stewards of the "Steward-ship" of our faith!"

Next Sunday, remember to come to Pinecliff Park for our combined service at 11am. We will share an insert of the hopes and dreams you write down on the cards today as well as the plans made by the people who gather to dream this Saturday morning and then put those dreams down on the calendar for the coming months, next year, and even beyond! Then the following week we will each make a critical decision about how we will express and grow in our generosity. When you receive your Giving Generously Card, please, be in prayer and seek God's direction for your expression of generosity toward the life and vision of God's ministry through this church. Alleluia and Amen.

Desire God

Jeffrey B. Childs 9/7/2024

Desire God first and foremost,
Enter into God's Kingdom.
Following Christ on the journey,
To a glorious outcome.

Just let go of all distractions,
Causing you to lose your way.
As disciples, follow Jesus,
Step by step and day by day.

Doesn't matter from where you start,
Focus on the final goal.
Faithfully focus on Jesus,
And the Lord will bless your soul.

Helping others upon the path,
With a kind and loving word,
That the future generations,
Join in following the Lord.