

Cherish the Vision!

Connected to Christ! Connected to one another! Connected to our community!

Acts 2:42-47 April 29, 2018 Pastor Robert Hein

Dear Fellow Members of the Body of Christ,

Do you know the difference between a **Vision** and a **Purpose**? There are very similar, but each has a slightly different emphasis. A purpose statement focuses on what you want to do or accomplish. A vision spells out what that will look like.

Let me give you an example. A couple years ago our leaders started meeting with our members to determine our facility needs, and from their input, we approved an expansion project.

What did we want to do to enhance our facilities? Well, we wanted to add an elevator, and a fellowship hall, and more classrooms, and storage, and offices, and space for Bible study. That was our purpose. But what was our vision? What did we want our expansion to look like? We entrusted that task to Excel Engineering, and they shared with us a vision of what our expanded facilities would look like when it was all said and done. You can view this vision up on our screens.

And now this adopted vision is unfolding right before our very eyes. It's interesting to compare the pictures they provided us a year ago with the finished product we now see before us. Yes, it's wonderful to see our vision become a reality.

It's very important to remember however that our purpose was not merely to build buildings. No, our main purpose is to build connections. Our expanded facilities are simply tools we use to help us carry out our purpose. Our entire ministry is about building stronger connections with the Lord through his Word, building stronger connections with one another through fellowship and service, and helping the people of our community get connected to Christ through the power of the Gospel.

So our purpose is to build connections. **What then is our vision?** What do we want our congregation to look like? It's easy to adopt a vision for a building project, because you have pictures and blueprints to guide you. But what about a vision for our

congregation? What do we want Good Shepherd Lutheran Church to look like as a family of believers?

Here's a vision I'd like you to consider today:

Connected to Christ! Connected to One Another! Connected to our Community!

What I find interesting is that this is the very same vision the early Christian adopted for themselves in our Scripture reading today from Acts chapter 2:42-27. Listen again to the Evangelist Luke describe this vision for us, **“42 They (the early Christians) devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”**

Now that is a vision worthy imitating today as well!

First and foremost those early Christians were connected to Christ. These verses follow immediately after the events of Pentecost where 3,000 people were added to the Body of Christ, the holy Christian Church. The Holy Spirit worked saving faith in these people's hearts through two powerful means of grace; the Word and Baptism. As they listened to Peter's message, the Lord converted them, turning them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

In baptism this growing family of believers enjoyed a new living connection with Jesus Christ. All the blessings Jesus won for them on the cross became their own personal possession. All the power of Jesus' resurrection became a new living force working within them, completing changing the way they thought and acted. The Apostle Paul describes our new living connection with Jesus this way, **“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”**

Galatians 2:20

What Jesus did for those early Christians, he has also done for you and me today. We too have been called out of the darkness of sin and unbelief into the light and life of Jesus Christ. Once we were not a people; but now we are the people of God. Christian friends, there is no greater privilege in life than to be connected to Jesus through the power of the Gospel! In Christ alone, we enjoy the forgiveness of sins. In Christ alone, we enjoy freedom from guilt and the control of Satan. In Christ alone, we enjoy access to God in prayer and comfort in times of trouble. In Christ alone, we enjoy a bright future and have a glorious home awaiting us in heaven.

This living connection, this new life in Christ filled the hearts of these early believers with peace and hope and joy and inspired them to want to praise God every single day with glad and sincere hearts. And you know what? These incredible blessings set our hearts on fire with that same peace, hope and joy today as well.

Notice that these early Christians recognized they were not called merely to live for themselves, as isolated individuals, cut off from everyone else, doing their own thing. No, they understand that when Jesus called them to faith, he also joined them together into the body of Christ, as a family of believers. That means, connected to Christ, they were also now connected to one another.

Christian friends, this is so important to remember. God did not intend any of us to live as “lone ranger” Christians. He gathers us into a family, a flock, a fellowship that worships together, and prays together, and serves together, and shares the Gospel together, with a sense of love and unity and common purpose.

This was the vision adopted by those early Christians. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. All the believers were together. Every day they loved to meet together. They broke bread in their homes and they ate together. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Can you catch this vision? Are you eager to adopt this vision to be your very own? Sadly, trends in our congregation and our country are going the opposite way. Our church attendance has been in decline the last several years, but not just ours. Worship

attendance at Christian churches throughout the United States is in decline. Studies indicate that the new generation of millennials are not joiners. They like to spend much of their time alone connected to their Smartphones, tablets and other pursuits, but not so much time joining together with their fellow believers for worship and Bible study and prayer. It's troubling that so many Christians today are comfortable with very infrequent worship attendance and reception of the Lord's Supper. It's troubling that so many seem content to sit on the sidelines and watch ministry take place rather than look for ways to become actively engaged in it. It's troubling that so many seem to be satisfied with an attitude of apathy and complacency.

So what do you think Christ's vision is for his church? What do you think he wants it to look like? What does he intend your role to be? Isolation or engagement? Walking alone or walking together? Complacency or commitment? Doing your own thing, or serving together as one united body in Christ eager to fulfill the vital purpose he sets before you.

The answer is obvious if you follow God's Word as a lamp for your feet and as a light for your path. Listen to the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:19-22, **"You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."**

This is Christ's vision for his church, for each one of us – Connected to Christ!
Connected to One Another! Connected to our Community!

Some people think these early Christians lived in a commune, but it doesn't really say that. Each person retained title to his own property, but the sense of fellowship and brotherly concern for one another was so strong that they freely shared with one another whenever anyone was in need.

Today, we too share a close personal connection as we pray for one another, and warmly greet one another, and serve one another in love. We demonstrate this

connection in our commitment to Christian education. Do you know that our church still supports about 70% of the cost of education for each student at Good Shepherd Lutheran School? Now some of you may not have any children in the school right now. So why should you care? Why? Because God had made us into a body of believers, a Christian family, connected to Christ and connected to one another in love. That means every student in our school or our Sunday school or at KML is family to you –those kids are your kids, and their spiritual needs are your personal concern. And this caring attitude extends beyond this congregation to the home and world missions of our Synod. Your mission offerings are helping people learn about Jesus all over the world – precious souls in Africa, and Russia, and Nepal, and Thailand, and Vietnam, and Mexico. Now you don't know these people personally. You have never even met them. But those Christians are family to you – In Baptism God has adopted them into the same family of believers you and I belong to. And so we do care about them, and pray for them, and are eager to help them grow in their walk with Jesus.

Those early Christians also had a passion for outreach. They were not simply content to keep the good news of Christ's resurrection to themselves. No, they were eager to share this good news with others as well. Even while facing threats and persecution and imprisonment, they boldly proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ with friends and neighbors alike. And the Lord added daily to those who were being saved.

And so it is with our mission, and our Gospel ministry today. Our vision is that everything we offer here at Good Shepherd we also want to offer to the unchurched people of our community. We built a welcome center as a place to offer a warm friendly greeting to guests and members alike. We expanded our school to serve our member children, but also to serve as an outreach to our community. We built rooms for Bible study, because we want to invite our unchurched friends and neighbors to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We look forward to hosting marriage retreats and parenting classes and kids programs and topical Bible studies and outreach events for everyone to enjoy. That's why we are getting out into our community next weekend through our community service day. It's all about making connections. Yes,

we are eager to use every resource and every opportunity God makes available to us to help precious souls get connected to Jesus through the power of the Gospel.

It will be great when the building construction is completed this summer. But actually that's when our real work of building connections will just get started. It will be exciting to plan and work together in the coming months to strengthen our connections with the Lord through his Word, and to strengthen our connections with one another through fellowship, Bible study and acts of Christian service.

Remember, each one of you here is privileged to be a part of that mission! God's Word teaches, **“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.”** Hebrews 10:24-25

I am here to encourage you. You are here to encourage me. We are all here to encourage one another to stay connected to Jesus, and to serve him in joy and gratitude all of our days. That's a purpose to get excited about, and a vision to adopt as our very own, just like those early Christians did. Amen.