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Old Mission / New Vision
The View from 30,000 Feet

Biblical Text: Luke 9:28-38

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There is a difference between purpose and vision. Purpose is what we are about, why we exist. And our purpose is from God who created us. That's why some of our spiritual ancestors asked, *"What is the chief end of man?"* with the answer being, *"To glorify God and enjoy him forever."*

At Old Mission, we would ask and answer the question this way: *"What is our purpose?"* **"Making a difference by Loving God and Loving people."**

"Vision" is something else. It's where we are going, where God is leading.

So this summer, the fourteen Lay and Staff Leaders of Old Mission went to the mountain together. OK, it was Excelsior Springs. But it was like going to the mountains, just less expensive and closer. *OK, it really wasn't like the mountains at all, I mean, really it wasn't.* But it was a couple of days away.

We took with us literally hundreds of ideas and inputs from our membership and the seventy people of our Church Council, and spent two days asking God what we should do. We also did some DNA testing, so to speak, and found that the basic ingredients that make Old Mission a Church are good.

They are not good everywhere.

I was at a meeting of Senior Pastors this week. They all talked about challenges facing their congregations: a bad location, a problematic building, internal conflict, no young people, a lack of leadership, a declining neighborhood, the burden of debt, another United Methodist congregation just few miles away. *And I did something really hard for me. I just listened.*

Why? Because we have a great location and building, an absence of internal conflict, and great leaders! We are surrounded by viable zip codes, great neighborhoods, and have younger members joining every year. We have no debt. After ten years, we have no debt! We are 30 minutes north of what Butch Ritter used to call *Disneyland*, and of all the United Methodist Churches in Johnson County, we are one of the strongest and most vital!

Our issue is "how do we capitalize on those strengths?" **What is our Vision?**

Vision is everything for the people of God, and for our lives. The Bible is right. Without vision we perish. ([Proverbs 29:18.](#)) We know that. Business leaders and politicians like to talk about the view from 30,000 feet. Why?

Vision is a powerful thing. If you wear glasses like I do, take them off. (*If you wear contacts feel free to not do so!*) Without my glasses, you look very fuzzy and out of focus to me, and I might to you. *Some mornings - that's a blessing!*

But the "Vision" I want to talk about is not about eyesight, or perspective on the political issues of the day – which we all have. It is about how we see life itself and possibilities within it. It is about finding God's "*bigger picture.*"

That really was the challenge facing Jesus and his disciples in our text this morning from Luke 9:28-38. (*There are parallels in Mark and Matthew.*)

"28 Now about eight days after these sayings (or things,) Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray."¹

After what sayings? What things? Pretty big things - according to Luke 9.

- 1 Jesus sent out the disciples with authority to heal and share the Good News.***
- 10 He fed the 5,000 and told the disciples they were to feed the hungry.***
- 18 He affirmed Peter's confession that He was the Messiah, the Son of God.***
- 21 He told them He would suffer and die, and to take up their cross and follow.***

He was preparing them for their ministry, which they didn't fully comprehend. They needed a bigger vision of what following Jesus was about! And they got it.

"30 Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him."²

In the Greek of the New Testament, what happened is called a "*theophany*" - a revelation or vision of God. And it's not by accident that Jesus was with Moses and Elijah, the embodiment of the Law and Prophets.

Such a theophany happened for Moses and Elijah too. It was on Mount Sinai, also called Horeb, where the *Transcendent* God spoke to Moses, "*Tell them I am is sending you,*" and that the *Immanent* God whispered hope to Elijah's fears in the "*still small voice.*"³

But this vision was not for Jesus! It was for the disciples.

¹ Luke 9:28. *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.*

² Ibid. Luke 9:30.

³ The accounts of Moses' and Elijah's encounters with God are found in Exodus 3 and I Kings 19.

And verse 32 is clear that Peter, James and John were on the mountaintop with Jesus to see it. Since Origen in the third Century, most scholars think that it was Mount Tabor near Galilee. What they saw was overwhelming.

“³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said.”⁴

It was a version of *“If you build it they will come”* which is only good for *“ball field fiction”* in a cornfield in Iowa, not for the Church. The only worse one for the Church was the billboard on Quivira Road, which for years said, *“If you come, we will build it.”* **Not good.** No, being the Church requires more.

“³⁵ ... from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.”

The message was clear. This is not just an ordinary teacher. Jesus is the Son of God. And to be His disciple means to listen to him, and follow after him.

How’s that for a view from 30,000 feet? Pretty overwhelming.

That’s the attraction and the problem with a view from 30,000 feet. We often forget that the doing is in the details, the day-to-day life of faithfulness. I think that’s what happened to the disciples.

That’s why I don’t like commercial air travel all that much. It gives the illusion of being disconnected from real life. I much prefer the view from a private plane where you can see what lies below. Besides, at 30,000 feet, without assistance you can experience confusion, *“hypoxia”* or *“oxygen starvation.”* I think that happens to business and political leaders a lot.

And to sports fans! We can get all wrapped up in a “Super Bowl” or “World Series” vision and only remember the “good old days!” **How about cheering on the Royals for a winning season and the Chiefs for starting 3-0!**

Likewise, I think that the followers of Jesus also need to stay connected to the ground and to fellow Christians or we can experience spiritual hypoxia. Our vision for following Jesus dare not be an exercise in spiritual escapism from the day-to-day reality of serving people!

⁴ Op Cit. Luke 9:33 and in the next paragraph Luke 9:35-36a.

I see this in Churches all the time. They set lofty goals of doubling their membership, only to put those goals on the shelf to gather dust.

But that's not what happened in our text. Look at what happened next.

37 On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. 38 Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child."⁵

Opportunity awaited them to follow Jesus in practical ways. The vision wasn't just the understanding that Jesus is the Son of God. It was also the understanding that everyone is someone's son or daughter, that each one is a child of God. **And so it goes, as we live into a vision for Old Mission.**

When our leaders went away to the *mountaintop* of Excelsior Springs, we could have come away with a rarified "pie in the sky" vision of the Church.

But we didn't. We came away convinced that we need to do four things, four simple, practical things, that God is calling us to do to move forward.

Activate spiritual growth. What will take us, spiritually, to the next level?

Creatively use our campus. How can we use our beautiful building and property more creatively to reach people?

Take the Church to the people. We need to continue to equip people to be the Church "out there." We do a lot. How can we do more?

Share God's story. How can we become more excited about letting people know the difference that God make in our lives and in theirs?

That's it. There will be more details in the days to come that each of us, everyone really, can respond to - but that's it in a nutshell.

If you think about it, those same four things work in our individual lives as we follow Jesus. They are these questions I want to ask you to pray about.

How can I take the next step of my spiritual growth?

How can I creatively use what I am and what I have more fully for God?

How can I take the Church to the people around me?

How can I share God's story and help people see they are part of it?

I have seen God transform the lives of people with questions like that, with a vision like that. May some of the lives transformed be ours! Amen.

⁵ Ibid. Luke 9: 37-38.