

EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY
3) A Vision Worthy of Our Investment

Mark 8: 22-26

Rev. Ron Dunn

November 6, 2011

Over the past couple of weeks we have been taking the pulse of our community of faith. We have been thinking about the programs and the people that make our church special and unique. Our heart cards have given voice not only to the things we love about our church, but also the people in our lives who have enabled us to grow in our understanding of what it means to be a follower / disciple of Jesus Christ.

This morning, our focus shifts from our consideration of program and people to our consideration of the vision that give shape, definition and direction to the life we share together as a community of faith. This, of course, is an extremely vital consideration as it is essential that we be absolutely clear with ourselves as to the central purpose that not only brings us together, but then sends us out in mission and service.

Thus far, you have been hearing a lot about the five goals that we have set for ourselves in terms of our ministry to and with our children and our youth. You have been hearing about the vital importance of our small group ministry—the laboratories for the grand experiment of faith. Many of you have been taking part in our unfolding goal of choosing to be in service to others. And finally, your presence here this morning suggests that you are mindful of the central importance of worship in our life together. It is the hub of the wheel from which our lives and their ministries radiate outward into the community around us.

Five goals that provide an important focus for our life together. While these goals are vitally important, they are not the vision. Instead, they provide a focus and a means by which our vision might be fulfilled. So what is the underlying vision that these goals support? The United Methodist Church has defined its vision / purpose this way: “To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” That’s it. To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” In other words, to change lives in the name of Jesus Christ—beginning with our own.

Our primary purpose as the San Ramon Valley UMC, you see, is not to create dynamic programs that attract lots of attention and lots of people. Our purpose is not to “pack em in” on Sunday morning. Our purpose is not to be recognized and admired as a successful church that really has it all together. Being a part of the culture that we are in, we are sometimes tempted to think that our vision is about these so called “bench marks” of success. These are the standard by which our culture determines what is successful and what is not. Now, rest assured that I am not against dynamic programs or a packed house. I am not opposed to creating a

positive buzz in our community about what we are about. But I just want to be clear that these benchmarks do not define or capture our purpose.

Our purpose is to “make disciples.” Our purpose is to change lives—the lives of children, the lives of youth, the lives of adults—in ways that enable us to both experience and express the love of God that we witness at work in the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ.

In our lesson from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus gives sight to a blind man. What is intriguing to me about this story is the fact that the man does not receive his full sight all at once. Why doesn't Jesus just heal him and be done with it? I suspect that the answer has something to do with the fact that healing of either a physical or spiritual nature isn't likely to happen all at once—as much as we wish that it were so. No, it is likely that the healing that we seek, the healing that we need, comes to us gradually in stages.

To speak of transformation as if it were an instantaneous and finished product is to misunderstand the nature of transformation. The change that God's love brings about in our lives is one that is most likely to happen gradually, in stages, over time. Initially, we may not even notice the change or, we may see only partially—in a glass darkly as the Apostle Paul would have it. But that does not mean that the change isn't taking place. Rest assured that whenever the Spirit of God is at work, it is. Eyes see and hearts are open to God great vision of love for our world.

One of the joys that I have in being your pastor lies in the fact that I am privileged to be an eye witness to the way that God's transforming love is at work in the life of our congregation. Perhaps you've notice that Warren McGuffin isn't in worship this morning—at least in our worship service. The truth of the matter is that Warren is giving a word of invitation and testimony to the Lynwood United Methodist Church in Pleasanton. Warren is speaking to them about his favorite topic—the children of Thomas, Haitia and the dream he has of providing daily lunches for them in the school they attend. Knowing that this may be the only meal that they eat all day, Warren wants to make sure that it is a healthy and nutritious meal—one that satisfies the gnawing hunger that is ever present.

When I think of the word, transformation, I think of Warren. In the time I have known Warren, I have witnessed his growth as a follower of Jesus. I have seen that growth in his desire to think and to learn and I have seen that growth in his passion to be in service to others—first in his outreach to the victims of Hurricane Katrina and now, in his conviction to make a difference for the children of Haiti. Warren is just one person, but let me tell you, Warren is making a world of difference. That's what happens when a person allows God's love free reign to work within them—they are transformed—not all at once—but gradually over time.

I don't think that I need to tell you that we live in a time in which there is a great blindness—a time in which people are blinded by their arrogance...blinded by their greed...blinded by their reluctance to look at life through any other lens than their own. The evidence of this blindness is everywhere around us.

In the midst of this dark time, we are called to open ourselves up to the transforming touch of Jesus...to open ourselves up to the light of God's love...to open ourselves up to the vision it offers—the vision of changed lives at work changing the life of our world.

Transformation. It is, in a word, what we are all about. This is the word that best captures the vision that makes our hearts beat a little faster, the vision that pulls us into our future. It is a vision, I believe that is worthy not only of our attention, not only of our passion, but it is a vision worthy of our greatest investment. Amen.