

## **The Vision** **Isaiah 65:17-25**

“Without a vision, the people will perish.” But what is the vision we’re supposed to see? Where are we headed as the Church? Where are we going as a particular congregation? Why working so hard? The focus of this message is to find answers to the question, “where are we going?” Next Sunday, we’ll talk about how to get there.

What is our vision? Let’s start with a passage from the Bible. This book is the text of our lives. It is a written and spoken word that points us toward a living word. At the very end of the book of the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 65: 17-25, there is a very compelling vision, but is it the vision for us? What did Jesus think of this vision and how has it affected Christianity? Does this Isaiah vision give us an idea, a vision, of where we’re going?

Isaiah’s vision comes at the end of the Babylonian exile for the Jewish people. It reflects the hope of returning home to repopulate Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. It is an inconvenient truth that about ten percent of the exiles actually returned home. The rest were too comfortable in their Babylon homes with their Persian rugs. These were the children’s children’s children of the original exile. There were the descendents of those who groaned and asked, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” That foreign land was now home, but many did return. What did they see when they raised their eyes toward distant Jerusalem that city only seen in their imagination? What was the vision, the prize of homecoming?

Pay close attention now: I'm creating new heavens and a new earth.  
All the earlier troubles, chaos, and pain are things of the past, to be forgotten.  
Look ahead with joy. Anticipate what I'm creating:  
I'll create Jerusalem as sheer joy, create my people as pure delight.  
I'll take joy in Jerusalem, take delight in my people:  
No more sounds of weeping in the city,  
No cries of anguish. (from Is. 65 NRSV)

Do these words sound familiar? We should read them like we read a parallel passage in the New Testament (from Revelation 21: 1-5):

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth....  
And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem....  
See, the home of God is among mortals....  
God himself will be with them....  
Mourning and crying and pain will be no more....  
See, I am making all things new. (from Rev. 21: 1-5 NRSV)

The vision of Isaiah, like the vision of John, articulates the mystery and wonder of life lived in intimate relationship with God and with each other. When we return to Jerusalem, life will be good, abundant, and full. It will be normal to live 100 years. There will be permanence. If you build a house, you’ll get to live in it a long time. When you plant crops, you’ll be able to enjoy the fruit of your labor. And perhaps more

important than anything is that everyone will enjoy good health, a long life, a house, and food. The wealth of the land will be available for everyone. And again there's even more -- "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox.... They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord." (from Is. 65 NRSV) There will be no more predators and prey. All creation, all of nature, will be secure and at peace. This was a vision of how the writer understood the Kingdom of God, the peaceable kingdom. It recalls God's original covenant with Abraham in which all people of earth would be blessed through Abraham's descendents. They were not just to be blessed by God, but also to be a blessing to all people.

That was a powerful vision. It pictures the possibilities of the result of a homecoming in God, the promises of journey's end. So, how was this vision embraced by Jesus? Pretty much completely! Jesus challenged his own people to be makers of peace. It was not enough to be set apart as the people of God – to be faithful in keeping traditional practices. They would also need to be a blessing to other nations. To be faithful to the vision, they would need to be hosts of a way of living where wolf and lamb would feed together. The Temple got it wrong. The zealous revolutionaries got it wrong. The Romans really got it wrong! Jesus challenged them all to embrace a vision of homecoming, justice, and peace. He called them to see a vision of abundance for all, but they rejected his call. They rejected him.

To those of us who follow him and embrace his vision, how is it challenging us? Author Walter Wink related a story in his book *The Powers that Be*. It seems there was a man walking through the streets of Calcutta. He was so moved and upset that the scene of human poverty and suffering that he cried out to God, "How can you allow this?" A moment later, he heard the voice of God crying back at him, "How can you allow this?" He realized how much God's vision is in our hands.

Almost 3 years ago, this congregation began a process that would lead us into a capital campaign and then to find and buy our first church building. The vision that guided that process was represented in the slogan, "Making our faith tangible and visible." During the capital campaign, one process we used that was very effective was to meet in small groups for a meal, to talk and share information, and to consider the question, "What do you see Crossroads Church doing that having our own building can help make possible?" Many visions were shared and some of them have begun to come true.

Our congregation's fidelity to the vision raised by that question led us to pledge money, effort, and enthusiasm. All this led to Crossroads Church coming to our present location in our own building. Another result of our response to the vision is the people who have come since our move. They now comprise a significant percentage of our congregation.

We are celebrating the home stretch, the victory lap, of that capital campaign. So much money has come in and continues to come in through pledges fulfilled and adopted, and work being done. In three years (as of next summer) of general offering giving and capital campaign giving, this congregation will have given over \$800,000 dollars to Crossroads Church! There have been some clear results of that money being given.

We've hosted some big events -- well over 1000 people having seen two musical theater productions in our sanctuary. There was our recent fall festival and last year's rain garden workshop and church open house. Some 200 people overflowed this room as we celebrated baptism and resurrection last Easter. In addition, there have been countless committees meetings, work group meetings, small group meetings, Sunday school classes, drama rehearsals, annual retreat sessions, *Invitations* retreats, and theater workshop sessions. There was my father's memorial service last year and we have two weddings coming up this spring here. Much life is being lived in this space that only existed in our imagination three years ago. Our vision and our faith are still tangible, still visible.

“Without a vision, the people will perish.” So, with a building and a with growing congregation, what visions do we now see? What is your fondest dream for Crossroads Church? What is it we need to see together as we look toward Jerusalem, toward homecoming, toward a fulfillment of the promise we have seen?

(We collected many visionary ideas at this time in the service). Today we share our dreams, our ideas, our vision). Next Sunday, we'll talk frankly about what we need to do to set goals around these fond dreams, to form a plan for action, and finally to achieve them. In the final analysis, it is our action that will changes these goals into *tangible expressions* of our being church. I invite you to pray for the fulfillment of the vision we see – the accomplishment of our homecoming and of our being in community. I invite you to pray and ask God for the ability to believe that there is a promised land and you will be willing to take the journey there.

I invite you to come back next Sunday and let us work on “how.” I invite you to step up and be a committed part of this congregation. Step up and make our vision tangible, and make our dreams visible!

### **Questions for Reflection**

- What vision do you see for your own life?
- Is there a fond dream that you want to see come true in your life?
- My vision is for Crossroads Church to be a place that supports and guides people on the journey of making their fondest dreams come true. Are you willing to work on your dreams as part of this faith community?
- Your dream is big enough when it requires your utmost commitment. Is your dream too small? What will it look like twice as big?