

2-1-26

The Beginning

Genesis 1: 1-2

For the longest time now, I've wanted to preach on the vision statement for the church that I worked on for a considerable amount of time over the past couple of years when I had some downtime. It's found in the bulletin every Sunday. It reads as follows:

"My personal investment in FCC reflects the church's ageless and active commitment to love God and one another exalting His holy name."

As I worked through the phrases and the wording that comprise the statement, I didn't want it to be too lengthy. Instead, I wanted something succinct, to the point, and something that is biblical and measurable.

I actually formed an acronym from it: the word M-i-r-a-c-l-e:

M: my personal

I – investment

R – reflects

A – ageless and active

C – commitment

L – love God and one another

E – exalting God's holy name

Miracles only happen by the hand of God, and I wanted everyone to be reminded that if we are to fulfill the church's vision it would only

happen if God's hand moves among us, in us, and through us to accomplish it. Only then can we truly call it a miracle.

If you haven't noticed by now, I like acronyms.

SALT is one of my favorite acronyms: Supporting Almont Learners and Teachers. By the way, SALT is resuming this Thursday. If anyone is interested in what happens at SALT, please come to church around 4pm and observe the many activities.

But what's interesting about my vision statement or mission statement – whatever you want to call it – is that when I approached the deacon board about having it put into the bulletin – of which they readily agreed - I just assumed that this meant that the new vision statement would replace the old one.

You know, the other vision statement that is always in every Sunday's bulletin as well: the four C's:

Communing

Communicating

Caring and ...Calling.

But it didn't get removed!

It stayed in there like a grape juice stain on a white tablecloth! I guess overtime it became part of the furniture. We got so used to seeing it that we forgot it was even there in the first place!

But let's not fret. We may be the only church within a 200- mile radius that has double vision! Hey, if one is good, two can only be better, right?

But I can see how there could have been some confusion. Afterall, the MIRACLE vision statement is found in the same section with my name, phone number and email. So, most of us probably thought that the pastor was just sharing his own personal mission statement. I get it, but you'd be wrong.

This new vision statement is meant for all of us!

It's meant for each of us to think about and consider and reflect upon how we can make an investment that indeed does reflect our commitment to love God and one another which in turn exalts God's holy name.

Obviously, this investment can take many forms: teaching Sunday school, volunteering as a tutor at SALT, serving as a trustee or deacon, helping with security, landscaping, bookkeeping, helping at coffee hour or the nursery or junior church, organizing the food pantry or helping lead worship, tithing, discipling, evangelizing.

The list goes is practically endless, and these are all ways that we can carry out the vision of the church: To love God and one another thereby honoring and glorifying His name.

Can a church's vision really get any more basic than this - to invest in a body of believers that demonstrates one's love for God and one another thereby bringing honor and glory to his holy name?

I think not.

And I know that many of you are already doing exactly what the church's vision statement says, and I rejoice in this, but the vision statement remains to remind us, because we can be easily side-

tracked and forget why we do the things we do. Ultimately, we're doing it for God's glory, and we can never afford to forget this.

Which brings me to the first part of the vision statement, namely the part that reads ... *My personal investment.*

Now normally, I guess it would be expected of the pastor to harp on the importance of investing in this organization called the church, but I fear this would be getting the cart before the horse.

There's no sense in trying to convince you to invest in something to which you feel no attachment.

In other words, we don't typically sacrifice and pour our resources into something that we don't claim or consider ours. For example, I don't go around and buy food and clothes for the neighbor kids or fix the neighbor's car because they're not mine.

I guess this has to do with the idea of ownership. If we have no skin in the game, why would we bother trying to support it or improve it or make it better?

So, I think it's incumbent upon me to somehow persuade you that you do, in fact, have a personal stake in this church and because you do, you're going to want to invest in it.

A couple of years ago for my birthday, my three daughters chipped in to buy me a very unique gift. Can you guess what it was?

It has to do with my passion and devotion toward the Green Bay Packers. I know it sounds crazy that someone would follow a professional sports team with such zealousness and gusto as I do.

My condition probably borders on maniacal fanaticism, but my daughters recognized this in me and instead of opposing it, they decided to purchase a share of the team for me! I was quite surprised and extremely excited, and I realized right then and there that my family truly understood me. And this made me feel loved.

How about you?

Do you know and love the church in such a way that you would be willing to invest in it? My obsession with the Green Bay Packers demonstrated to my family that I am fully invested and they, on some level, caught my vision.

What about you?

Will you catch God's vision for the church and invest?

Or will you keep God's church at arm's length believing that a safe distance from church makes for an easy and uncomplicated extraction especially when things aren't as rosy as we would like them to be?

Lately, I 've been reading a book about the church entitled The Church - quite a creative title, wouldn't you say?

It is written by DR. Edmund Clowny whom I actually had a chance to hear speak many years ago at a Christian camp in Michigan. He was at one time the President of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. And he gives a very in-depth theological description of the church, much of which is beyond my limited capacity to retain, but I will quote him at least on this one point. He writes ...

“In the history of revelation, the Old testament people of God become the church of the Messiah, formed as the fellowship of the Spirit. The Bible does not deliver shipments of doctrine in cargo containers. Rather, the new grows out of the old, as the flower opens from the bud. The coming of the Spirit fulfills the promise to Abraham and makes the Gentiles Abraham’s seed. Only in the coming of the Spirit is the body of Christ given its full reality, just as only in Christ’s redemption do sinners become the true people of God, sprinkled with the blood of the New Covenant.”

Notice, that in his description, he made mention of God’s Spirit three times. Once concerning the fellowship of the Spirit that unites the Old Testament people of God under the umbrella of the Messiah. The second time he writes that the coming of the Spirit fulfills God’s promise to Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. Finally, he writes that it’s only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that the church can be the church, Christ’s body, and realize her mission here on earth.

And it’s this activity of the Holy Spirit that I want to highlight briefly this morning as a means for us to understand God’s investment in us and our appropriate response.

God invested in us and is investing in us. Should we not then invest in his church?

And so, I take you to the place in the Bible where God begins investing in you – and you might think that I would take you to the manger where God takes on human flesh and chooses to be completely vulnerable and at the mercy of corrupted and sinful man, or to the wilderness where he endures forty days without food

being tempted and tried in every way humanly imaginable. Maybe I should take you to the passion week where Jesus resolutely faces his enemies and is betrayed by his own only to face tortuous death on the cross, or to the cross itself to which he is nailed to feel the full force and burden of humanity's sins and separation from his loving Father. These would all be good places to discover and realize how God has sacrificially invested in us. But instead, I'm going to take you even further back in time.

In fact, I'm going all the way back to the very beginning where Moses writes in Genesis 1: 1 -2, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*"

Right from the very beginning, we read that God invested in his creation and in us. Do you see it?

Moses tells us that God begins by making something out of nothing, but shockingly, it is completely uninhabitable for any sort of life. I say shockingly because we typically think of God always having a purpose behind his activities - and indeed he does - but here it almost appears as though there is no purpose. The world was empty, without form, and void of light – pure darkness.

The earth has no capacity whatsoever to sustain life. In and of itself, the world has neither the will nor the desire or consciousness or mechanism to bring forth life. It is just there, suspended in the universe and in complete darkness. The only one who knows it even exists is God himself because he put it there by speaking it into being.

But maybe this is exactly why God made it the way he did at the beginning. To teach us a valuable lesson, that without his ongoing investment into his creation, it would be stopped cold in its tracks. It would have no purpose, no meaning, no future.

Maybe Moses, by his description, is trying to tell us that without God's investment of his Holy Spirit into his creation, the universe remains shockingly dead and without purpose and without life-giving qualities.

And so here we see God investing. He's invests physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually!

Can't you see the world almost begging God to change its sorry state?

I admit that sometimes I've felt like this initial creation – formless and empty and dark. What am I to do? The only thing I can do: Beg God for help. Beg God to help me see how he has invested in me.

You see, my intention in this message is to bring you hope – to have you see the hope you have in Christ, and hope is so overwhelmingly evident in Genesis chapter 1:2: "*And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*" Do you realize that your body is made up of over 70 percent water?

You see, the Spirit of God was only getting started with creation. And he's only getting started with us. Like any construction project, there are phases that must be followed. What looked like complete chaos and purposelessness actually becomes the central theme of God's magnificent plan for creation, redemption, reconciliation, restoration, salvation, sanctification and glorification!

And it all starts with the Spirit of God hovering over the waters and hovering over us, claiming us as his own as an eagle or other bird would hover over her nest of fledglings. Demonstrating ownership, care, compassion and nurture.

The Spirit of God continues to hover over us, surveying, assessing, determining what is best for us and planning for our unimaginable blessed futures – and then making it happen.

Can you feel the anticipation the world must have felt – if it could have felt- as God's Spirit hovered over it?

Do you have sense of anticipation in regard to your future with God? I hope you do, because if you don't then you're not exercising the faith God has given you.

The Spirit of God hovering over us should bring us comfort and peace and hope, because it means that our Creator is not done investing in us. He sees our future as his children, his people and it brings him great satisfaction and joy.

As the Spirit of God hovers over us and in us, He takes great pleasure in seeing and knowing what we have only sampled and have yet to fully realize.

“No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.” 1 Cor. 2: 9-10