

As we begin this new year and as we make our resolutions, I offer to you our reading from the Psalms as an addition to your resolution list:

*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”*

What if that topped your list of things to do every day this coming year?

The way I see it is that if we could do that, then we would be fulfilling God’s resolution for you and me as Peter writes in his letter:

*“To be God’s own people, in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

That’s the starting point for this sermon as we consider where we are: as a congregation who will be seeking a new pastor; and each of you, as a living, breathing child of God who is looking to see God at work in his or her life.

And I want to frame these thoughts around the words of ‘wishes, dreams, and visions.’

The Bible is pretty clear about visions; in fact, we are told that ‘where there is no vision, the people perish.’

So, having vision is serious business if you are to live the faithful life – visions are a clear and focused image of what God would have us do, would have us be, would have us think.

First of all – I want to be clear that visions are not to be confused with wishes and dreams.

A wish is something you and I would like to see happen, but it’s something beyond our ability to make happen.

I worked with a Type A PNC – when I first met them, you want somebody for this Sunday – “No, we wanted them last Sunday!”

That was ‘wishful thinking’ - and when we bring this kind of mentality to faith, we have what I call ‘sweepstakes religion.’

Because once you wish for something impossible for you to make happen, the responsibility for the magic needed to make the wish come true is given to some far-off object: “Star light, star bright, how I wish upon a star tonight...”

And in faith, that comes out like this: “God, I wish everybody would see things my way; I wish we could fill up this church every Sunday...”

God is that far-off object, and we’ve given it to God and that’s where it ends. Because wishing is safe – it doesn’t cost us anything.

That means you don’t really get emotionally involved – and if you don’t get emotionally involved, you don’t invest much of yourself in turning that wish into reality.

Now dreams are a little bit different.

A dream is also an image of something a person would like to see happen. But it’s different from a wish because people do get emotionally involved in their dreams.

We feel our dreams, and we will invest some time and energy in thinking about them.

A PNC will develop a ‘dream candidate’ – each of you have dreamed about the perfect candidate:

Something like this – 25 years old with 50 years’ experience; can preach the whole Bible in a 10-minute sermon; always out visiting the homebound, but you can find him in the office any time you need him; dedicated to family time, but at the church every night for some meeting and all day Saturday working on the sermon – you get the picture – a DREAM.

The same for our own personal dreams: we like to dream the impossible dream, but that’s as far as it goes.

And dreams, like wishes, don’t produce the necessary energy that guarantees they will become reality.

And this is where visions differ from dreams and wishes – we own our wishes and dreams because we create them.

But vision, as the Bible speaks about it, are created by the divine reality, greater than you or me – visions come from God.

As someone said, “Visions are a lover’s embrace by God – they catch hold of us, they won’t let us go.”

That means when a vision has hold of us and won’t let us go – wishes vanish, dreams disappear, but with vision, we live and thrive for God’s purposes.

It’s very easy to tell whether a person or a group is expressing a wish or a dream or a vision. All you have to do is listen to what they say and see what they do about what they say.

Words alone – wishes.

Words and some emotion, but that’s all – dreams.

But a vision – all of your words, emotions, and actions are united in a common quest to bring it into reality.

You don’t even have to hear what these people say – their actions speak louder than any words.

Their actions speak louder than words because mission is attached to vision – not to wishes, not to dreams – Mission is attached to Vision.

Let me put it in the form of a question: What would you do, if you could do anything? How would this day be, if you could create it to be just the way you want?

What would occupy your thoughts, if you did not have to worry about anything? What actions would you take, if you were sure you would not fail?

What would you say if you were not concerned about what anyone else might think? How would you live, if you allowed your most treasured inner values to be expressed in your outer world?

And that brings us back to where we began - a resolution to focus on the God’s word, God’s law, God’s way of life for you - to be God’s people, to be God’s person.

As I listened to you during our home meetings this past October, as I listened to your new

officers talk about their vision for the church, as we will listen to one another share our thoughts on this church and your desires for pastoral leadership, I think about the words of a prayer that summed up what they saw for their church to be God’s people:

*To make the door of this church wide enough to receive all who need human love and fellowship and your divine care; and narrow enough to shut out envy, pride, and hostility...to make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling block to children, to weak or straying feet; but rugged enough and strong enough to turn back the tempter’s power...to make the door of this church a gateway to God’s eternal kingdom...that our people continue to be God’s forever, and daily increase by the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ’s love and service to others...*

That’s where this congregation is today – that’s where you are - You have a solid and sustaining vision for how great you know life can be.

Not a wish, not a dream, but a vision.

The only question is: Can the reality of your life really match the beauty of your highest and best vision for that life?

You bet it can! For why would God give you the vision of a great life unless you also had the ability to attain it?

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), founder of the Society of Jesus or Jesuits, proposed a daily exercise which he called the Examen of Consciousness or the Daily Examen—a simple exercise in discernment.

Rather than focusing on what went right or wrong, how you failed or succeeded throughout the day, this exercise encourages you to reflect on moments when you were aware of God—when you were present to Love—and those times when you were forgetful or distracted.

As you focus on God’s presence in your day, the more you connect with that vision of God’s desire for your life and the more real it will become; as you live your very best vision of life as God’s person right now, and always.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.

