

Acts 16:9-15
Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5
John 14:23-29

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Today's Scripture lessons are filled with reassurance and visions, as Jesus tells His disciples: "Let not your hearts be troubled," and the Book of Revelation describes a taste of Heaven. There is a small plaque near the north entrance and bathrooms of our church which declares from Proverbs 19:18 – "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The 16th chapter of Acts describes a vision which confronts Paul to have compassion for the people of Macedonia.

Funny thing about visions... on one hand, they fill us with hope and excitement. On the other hand, visions confront us with the risk of failure and the uncertainty of despair, wondering how and when we'll be able to make a difference. Any change means things could get better or worse. It reminds me of the novel by Charles Dickens, "The Tale of Two Cities," in which he wrote: "It was the best of times, and it was the worst of times." Somehow, these seemingly contradictory statements can be true at the same time... if not now, perhaps some point in the future.

Our human tendency is to procrastinate by simply waiting to see what happens. We might suspect some visions to be pipedreams, or so far in the future, we'll never see it. If it seems possible to attain a vision, perhaps it will take too much time and effort, not to mention money. If we've lived this long without it, why go through all the trouble? It's easy to get discouraged.

Jesus understood this about people, including His disciples. Even after He demonstrated God's powerful love through His miraculous resurrection, Jesus knew everyone loses hope by the obstacles of daily life. He said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." We might wonder how in touch with reality Jesus is. It's like He's up in Heaven, and we're in the pits.

Jesus told His disciples He was going away, but they would not be deserted in His absence. He would send the Holy Spirit, a special friend and Advocate from God. This Spirit would be our inspiration and guide, reminding us of the peace of Christ. This peace would be different than the worldly kind. On this earth, we figure we've got peace if there's an absence of conflict. But Christ's peace is the kind which is strong in the midst of conflicts, renewing joy in the midst of sorrow, bringing a vision of hope in the darkness of despair. It brings love and forgiveness to wounded souls. Notice how Jesus did not promise His disciples a life free from problems. But He does promise this spiritual peace He gives will be sufficient in dealing with the temptations and conflicts of sin. We will be given courage and comfort in His name.

I read how a music professor named A.J. Showalter received sad news in 1887. Two of his former students had just lost their wives. In despair, both men turned to their old teacher for comfort. Showalter felt like no words of his own could help, so he turned to Scripture and found Deuteronomy 33:27 – "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Showalter wrote a melody for these words to send to these widowers. You might

recognize it: “Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms; leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.”

This is what Jesus told His disciples, how they would always have someone to lean on in the best and worst of times, a special friend and advocate called the Holy Spirit who would bring them peace. We can discover the assurance of what God desires when we catch a glimpse of His heavenly kingdom, sensing a vision beyond the obstacles of our day-to-day troubles. And when this Spirit grabs hold of us, we’re no longer content to sit on the sidelines. Then our prayer shifts to the mindset of a team player, willing to do whatever we can, believing if the Lord wills it, He will find a way. In the grand scheme of things, we trust God will somehow use us.

There’s a book entitled: “Standing on the Promises or Sitting on the Premises,” by James W. Moore. The title itself asks a fairly thought-provoking question. In the book itself, Moore tells of an American tourist who went to visit the city of Damascus, where the Apostle Paul was converted. When he got to the busy marketplace on the street called Straight, he saw a man riding slowly through the crowd on a bicycle, precariously balancing a basket of oranges on the handlebars. He was accidentally bumped by a porter, and the oranges scattered everywhere. The cyclist and porter got into an angry shouting match. A crowd gathered around to watch the fight. The enraged cyclist moved toward the porter with a clenched fist.

But just then, a tattered little man stepped out of the crowd and positioned himself between the adversaries. Then the little man did an amazing thing. He reached out, tenderly took the cyclist’s clenched fist in his hands, and gently kissed it! He kissed the fist. A murmur of approval swept over the crowd. They laughed, and then they applauded. The antagonists relaxed and hugged each other. And all the people began happily picking up the oranges.

When the little man began to drift away, the American followed him, and complimented him: “What a brave and beautiful thing you did! It was wonderful, but why did you do it? Why did you risk it?” The little man smiled and answered, “Because I am a Christian! The Spirit of Christ was in me, and He gave me the courage to be a peacemaker. He gave me the courage to do the right thing.”

This kind of courage came from a vision, a vision of peace in the midst of conflict, a vision of Christ’s presence which no one else saw at first. But they recognized the fruits of Heaven’s kingdom: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. They experienced forgiveness in their midst. Someone who leaned heavily upon the arms of God helped everyone feel His embrace. What is your vision for what Christ is doing among us? What is He doing through you?

I am glad for each of you who came to the premises of All Saints today ... but I pray your “take home” message is to stand upon Christ’s promises, and to bring God’s Spirit of peace and a taste of Heaven’s light and healing to this wounded world, to people overwhelmed by darkness and conflict. It’s a vision and commission Jesus gives you and me ... in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.