

# VISION SUNDAY

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## A Service of Celebration, Anticipation & Prayer

### Welcome

Good morning! Whether you are a newcomer or a veteran here, young or older, a Giants or a Patriots fan (or rooting early for the Bears' next season), you are warmly welcome to this service.

As the note on the cover of your worship folder suggests, today is an unusual one in the life of our church. We are deliberately pausing for a moment between the season of Christmas and Epiphany just past and the season of Lent just ahead. We are stopping on the journey to give thanks for what God has done, to look ahead at where God is leading us as a church family, and to commit ourselves in prayer and person to the God who calls us.

Because we are a church family, it is only natural that we should recognize the people sitting around the table with us. Take just a moment now to say hello to someone you may not yet know and find out what they plan to be doing at 5:00 this evening... [Brief sharing time, followed by invitation to sit]

### Call to Worship

#### Songs/Hymns of Adoration

#### Scripture & Reflections on the Call to WORSHIP

For some time now, we at Christ Church have been describing our life as disciples of Jesus in terms of the call to WORSHIP, GROW, and SERVE. Those three rhythms of the spiritual life are the way we walk the path of discipleship.

It all begins with and keeps returning to WORSHIP. There is no message in the Bible more often repeated than the call to worship God. In 1 Chronicles 16 we read: **Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise... Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy in his dwelling place... ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD.**

Some of you know that a man was once asked why he kept returning so often to Athens, climbing up the Acropolis, and sitting for hour upon hour just gazing at the magnificent Parthenon – the most perfectly proportioned building in the world. “I keep coming,” he said, “because I find it keeps my standards high.”

This is why Jesus says in Luke 4:8, **"It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"** In the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John asks: **<sup>4</sup> Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."**

Over this past year, the Christ Church family has brought glory to God's name and reflected upon his righteous acts in some 290 Sunday and Special Services. I hope you have come close to the Lord and He to you through some of these ministries – and that this communion has lifted your heart, mind, soul, and strength. There's even more to come, and I'd like to give you a glimpse of what's ahead.

This coming Wednesday, we'll begin together the sacred season of Lent. Our Sanctuary will be open in the early morning and then again at Noon for those who'd like to come and receive ashes – which is, of course, the traditional mark of repentance for sin. At 6:30 P.M., Rev. Adele Calhoun will lead us in a full Ash Wednesday worship service.

I know that worshipping God isn't on everyone's list of popular things to do on a Wednesday or any time for that matter. If you've been disturbed by the recent spate of books by prominent atheists... or maybe are just a humble skeptic yourself... or you know someone who is... I hope you'll find our Lenten Sermon Series speaking helpfully to you. In your **Pathways Bulletin**, you'll find a complete list of the topics we'll be exploring in the coming days as we examine the theme of "Crucified Christianity."

We'll be closing out our Lenten Season with a cascade of particularly glorious worship services. We're bringing back the spectacular Passion Oratorio on Palm Sunday. Who might you invite along to that or one of the other very meaningful Holy Week experiences here at Christ Church?

In mid-May, the children of our church are going to lead the message portion of two of our morning worship services as they present a very special Musical. It has been so encouraging to see how our children's choir program has continued to develop young worshippers in recent years – and on May 18 you'll really get a sense of that.

As we come now to prayer, let's bring these worship ministries and our hearts before the Lord who is worthy of all glory.

**Prayers of the People (Responsive)**  
**Ministry in Music / Celebration Station Dismissal**  
**Scripture & Reflections on the Call to GROW**

Every time I sign a baptismal certificate, I write in the citation for this passage from the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Read it aloud with me: <sup>14</sup> **For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long**

**and high and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

I love this passage because it reminds me that God's desire is to fill us with the love and power that is the essence of the character of Christ himself. In fact, Paul goes on in chapter 4 to say that the job of church leadership is to equip God's people for this kind of growth in Christlikeness. Paul writes: **It was [God] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

The church leadership here takes this charge very seriously. It's why we've been working over these past few years to develop a variety of growth-oriented communities, classes, and small groups. It's why we've invested in expanding the Bookstore and developing discipleship curriculum for all ages. But this kind of growth in Christlikeness requires investment on the part of the person wanting to grow too. As Paul says, it means taking intentional steps to root and establish oneself in Christ. The question I want to pose today is: What is the next step on your intentional journey toward Christlikeness?

Perhaps it is experimenting with some spiritual discipline during this Lenten Season ahead – something that will open your heart and mind to God on a daily basis. The Bookstore has some great resources that can help with that.

Maybe it's going to the upcoming Couples' Conference. Growing the strength of your marriage will have a cascading effect on the character of your home life, parenting, and witness elsewhere. My wife Amy and I will be the ones at the back taking copious notes!

Or perhaps you'll invest in a Lenten Group. The **Pathways Bulletin** we've given you points you toward the variety of study guides and group options available to you. I'll tell you that my own relationship with Christ and growth in his character is deeply dependent upon what God does through the discipleship groups of which I'm a part. Recently, I had the chance to sit down with some men and with some women who've made a similar investment in a group like this. Listen to what they had to say, then we'll spend some more time in prayer together.

**Group Life Video Testimony  
Prayers of the People (Guided & Silent)  
The Lord's Prayer (Sung)  
Scripture & Reflections on the Call to SERVICE**

If you are genuinely worshipping God each week, that personal encounter with Him is going to make you want to go on an intentional journey beyond this hour to grow more like Him. And as you become more like him, it is going to show itself in that servant-

hearted love that marked the life and ministry of Jesus. Christ put it this way in Matthew's gospel: <sup>14</sup> **"You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before people, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven..."** <sup>26</sup> **Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,** <sup>27</sup> **and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--** <sup>28</sup> **just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**(Matthew 5:14-16; 20:26-28)

It is an amazing pleasure to watch someone in whom the light of Christ is brightly shining and the love of Christ has rolled up its sleeves and bent its knee. But it is truly an awesome privilege to watch a whole CHURCH full of such people. As Gordon McLean would say, I've had a ringside seat at that miracle. What a year the serving, life-changing love of Jesus Christ had through you in 2007.

- More than 800 of you gave your time and energy to local mission service opportunities – and that's not even counting all the ways that members of this congregation have volunteered their gifts in organizations and activities with which Christ Church doesn't have a formal relationship.
- More than 300 of you gave a week or more of your life to go off on a Global Outreach team to serve alongside one of our mission partners around the world.
- In its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, you supported our alternative Christmas market, Spirit Village, to the tune of \$215,000 – more than double what was given the year that Spirit Village was started here.

Those numbers tell one story. What I want to know is how many unquantifiable stories could be told of people's lives that were changed because they either served or were served in the name of Christ? Consider the cumulative impact over just the past 12 years of our 42 year history as a church...

In this past 12 year period, the community of disciples at this corner have given away \$14,216,000 to serve the Lord's interest in the spiritual and physical needs of people. Do you see why the local church counts?

And what may happen in this year ahead? Plans are underway for our 2008 Mission Festival. We'll be looking at the clash between Christianity and Islam and asking how we can be a creative player in this conflict. To help us think through these issues we have two of the most formidable Christian witnesses in the world today – Mama Maggie Gobran from Cairo, Egypt and Dr. John Haggai, a pioneer in global Christian leadership development. I hope you'll come learn from them and meet our other mission partners on the first weekend in May.

There's another team hard at work preparing for this year's Project Serve. Joining them is our new Director of Servant Ministries, Susan Demel. Susan began work with us in January, following a long tenure as head of the Willow Creek Community Church's Urban Alliance Ministry. I want you to meet her today. Will you join me in extending a warm welcome to our newest staff-member, Miss Susan Demel! [Applause] Susan, to

be frank, May 17 feels a long way off right now. What do you want us to know today about Project Serve?

**Meet Susan Demel**  
**Prayers of the People (Congregational)**  
**Song/Hymn of Prayer & Praise (Seated)**  
**Scripture & Reflections on the Call to COVENANT**

Thriving churches have great clarity about three things. First, they are very clear on WHO has called them. Secondly, they are clear about what their MISSION is. And thirdly, they are clear about the RESPONSIBILITIES that each member has in the fulfillment of that mission.

Here at Christ Church, we know that it is none other than Jesus who has called us to the mission that is printed each and every week on the cover of our worship folder and impressed upon the heart of each member. From time to time it is helpful, however, to rededicate ourselves to the responsibilities of membership.

As Greg Ogden has reminded us in recent weeks, when we read the Bible we get a clear and recurring picture that life between God and his people is a covenantal one. It involves pledges or promises on both sides. God says: **“I will be your God and you will be my people”** and the people of the Old and New Testaments say in response: **“And we will strive to do all that you have commanded.”** The covenant God makes with us is written in the words of Scripture, sealed in the blood of Christ, and expressed in innumerable spiritual and material graces.

In the pew racks before you today, you will find a card that offers us one means of expressing our response to this reality. If you find it helpful, **sign this card today** as your way of saying to God: “I also covenant with you, God, in these three important ways.”

We’re not asking you to turn this card in. This isn’t a legalistic exercise. Take the card home with you. Put it in your Bible, in your wallet or purse, on your bathroom mirror or on your desk at work -- wherever you will see it often and be reminded of the commitment you have made to the God who has committed himself first to you.

I would, however, encourage you to tell someone, if you have signed it. Give that person permission to ask you how the covenant is going. I don’t know a single significant commitment I’ve made in life in hope of blessing – whether it was marriage, athletics, financial planning, you name it – where it has not been helpful to have someone who cares ask me from time to time: How is it going? Can we encourage one another in this way?

May it go well with each of us as we continue to respond to the Call of Christ in our lives. May we be that kind of worshipping, growing, and serving community of disciples that is a blessing to others and whose witness brings glory to God’s name. As we

dedicate ourselves afresh to this high calling, our tithes and offerings will now be received...

**Offering Ourselves to God / Offertory Anthem**  
**Song/Hymn of Dedication**  
**Benediction**  
**Postlude**