

"A Dream or a Vision?"

Message Delivered by Robert Kukla

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Deuteronomy 6: 10-12

10 When the Lord your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—a land with fine, large cities that you did not build, 11 houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you have eaten your fill, 12 take care that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Acts 2:14-21 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Peter Addresses the Crowd

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

20 The sun shall be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Greeting:

I am pleased to be here this morning and see a few familiar faces and then some fresh new ones as well, for that is how the church should be, with one foot in today, and one in the future. Our scriptures today speak these things.. The legacy of inheritance we have each enjoyed in our respective churches, and the dreams and visions that lead us forward, step by step to new beginnings. Also, the reminder that this is the church of Jesus Christ, not ours.

My career has given me 33 years in private family company, and at least a half dozen boards of non-profits, before spending these last nearly twenty years assisting churches in funding capital projects. So, the most frequent question I get is "what's the difference between running a church and running a business? My answer is simply this- In business it's all about the bottom line and getting there as quickly and effectively as you can. In the church, it's just as important to have your sights set on the bottom line, but the key is process. If you don't allow the Holy Spirit to work through the people and process, you can never get to that bottom line.

This is why I believe in the St. Luke and the task you've got before you. I'm not sure where the name Delta Committee came from but I know you've been actively assessing and monitoring where you are and where you want to be.

Ten years ago I was here to assist with a Phase I project to enhance your Worship space. While the price tag was healthy and some had sticker shock, you moved forward and did a great job of funding that Objective.

Phase II became problematic from the standpoint that after seven or eight years, the Delta committee decided the Objectives were no longer fully valid. We, St Luke and churches of every denomination, are caught in paradigm shift. The old way of doing church doesn't seem to suit the younger generations and that presents several challenges. Society is changing so fast that it's difficult to keep up, maybe impossible, especially for an institution such as the church which by its nature moves very slowly. Some of the theories about what the church of the next decade will look like include creating "a third place" other than work or home to gather and form community on a daily basis, not a weekly basis. (Starbucks success has been attributed to creating that "place", not it coffee). The rise of the "home or house church" where members gather to worship in their homes in small groups rather than a "sanctuary". There's a pretty long list, and there are no right or wrong answers to the guessing game. While these changes effect what we would consider one of the elements of church which we identified over the years as Worship, Christian Education, or Fellowship, how we do mission has also been evolving. Does your church sponsor a work day at Habit- or Mission Trip, working at a Food Pantry? In my day, we sent a prayer and check, but not today or tomorrow for sure. So, that leads us to the greatest challenge- If this is what the younger generation wants, and our membership and worship attendance is declining, how do we respond? One group studying and sharing in this journey is known as NEXT church and I would suggest you stay in touch with them and share their experiences.

Last week Lesley talked about our common identity- Who we are and Whose we are- It is our foundation and compass to guide and direct our daily lives as well as our institutional life as a church.

A wonderful grounding and one of my very favorite sayings, but.... This is the 30,000 ft view of the world we wish to navigate, and doesn't tell us much about how to do church..

Francis of Assisi is attributed with having said "I preach everyday, and sometimes I use words." A true doer of the Word", like many of us. We have to be able to navigate from that 30,000' to actual onsite ministry.

Tomorrow is a day set aside to honor the memory and work of Martin Luther King Jr- Who can hear those words of “I have a Dream” without a sense of awe and respect. Unfortunately his life was cut short and his needed leadership ceased to effectively work to accomplish the dream. As we know, the task was monumental and still challenges us today, maybe even more obvious to we have white privilege than to those who have suffered for generations.

You too have a vision of inclusivity- one that demands you eliminate barriers of accessibility, physical or otherwise. You also have a dream that changes your definition of “sanctuary”. Ten years ago you identified this room as your sanctuary- now I hear you saying we must meet the needs of the “at risk” people living in our community. I see this vision as expanding your definition of sanctuary to the entire building. Giving ministry teams flexible spaces to experiment, new welcoming environment that assures no one will turn away before they enter the building, accessibility that allows every person, no matter their physical limits, the ability to move around freely in this place, communication of information and invitation to partake, while supporting youth, families, and those that still prefer the more traditional worship styles that brought us into the church in the first place. I don’t believe this plan could have emerged without the presence of the Holy Spirit in this place. People just don’t plan on change for the sake of change. They do it because they love their church, what it has done for them, and who they are as a community so that new generations can come, taste, nourish their spirit, and pass on the legacy.

Individual responsibility-

And this leads us to individual responsibility as a member of this community of faith-

The campaign team will be having approximately 8-10 home gatherings to share the story, and receive additional input. Not all decisions are made, they are mostly at concept stage, still flying at 30,000, and details will take shape once the plans reach final drawings, so now is a good time to express your suggestions.

You have a voice that needs to be heard, use it and hopefully a willingness to fund the plan.

This church showed its capacity in your first campaign and your annual budget is increased 50% over what it was ten years ago, so I know you can do this.

From Deuteronomy, we heard about the people who inherited the land-

large cities

houses filled with goods

vineyards and orchards you did not plant

It is like that in a church- Each new member inherits a ministry they did not build, a gift from the generations before them.

My wife and I raised 4 children and they sang in church choirs and played in youth group and learned about Our Savior. Our values are interwoven with the fabric of First Wheaton.

This is a legacy opportunity- to leave a church similar or even in a better place than when you arrived.

Years ago we heard a voice crying- "I have a Dream". Just a few nights ago we heard another voice saying "Yes we can!" And we know, all things are possible through Jesus Christ who strengthens us!