The Church of My Dreams

Vienna Presbyterian Church
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1 Chronicles 29:1-9

November 23, 2014
Let me take you back to the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. Twelve hours before the march, Martin Luther King still had no idea what he would say. So much attention had been given to the logistics of the event that his speech was not a priority.

King met with his staff at the Willard Hotel on the eve of the march to discuss his speech. He received conflicting advice from his top advisors. Wyatt Wallace said, “Don’t use the line ‘I have a dream.’ It’s trite. It’s cliché. You’ve used it too many times already.”

Martin finally excused himself. “I’m going upstairs to my room to counsel with my Lord. I’ll see you all tomorrow.” At 4 am, King finished his speech and went to sleep. The line about the dream was not part of his final manuscript.

The next day, over 200,000 people gathered on the mall. King was the 16th scheduled speaker on the program. He began his talk by likening the promises made by America as a promissory note to the Negro people. America had defaulted on this note and issued Negroes a bad check. The March on Washington had come together to cash that check America had given in promise.

It had the makings of a good speech. Not one of King’s best, but adequate, given the circumstances. About 12 minutes into his speech, the gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, who had sung earlier in the program, spoke loud enough for Martin to hear, “Tell them about the dream, Martin.” Almost on cue, King put aside his prepared remarks and started preaching. Clarence Jones, who had helped King with the speech the previous night, whispered to the person standing next to him, “These people don’t know it yet, but they’re about to go to church.” King referenced the Old Testament prophets of Amos and Isaiah. He punctuated every point with the refrain, “I have a dream.” He closed with the words
of a Negro spiritual, “Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, I’m free at last.”

Every time I hear King’s speech, it moves me. I’m not surprised that speech professors rank it as the greatest speech of the 20th century.

I don’t mean to suggest that this sermon can compare with King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Yet, on this Vision Sunday, I’d like to talk about my dreams for this church. That’s why I’ve titled this sermon, “The Church of my Dreams.”

About a month ago, something began to stir in me. I wanted to share my dreams with you on Sunday, November 23rd. I went to The Story to see if there was anything in chapters 12-13 that would connect with this theme. When I read of David’s elaborate dreams to build a temple, it all came together.

First Chronicles tells David’s story. This warrior king has successfully vanquished Israel’s foes. The people have rest from all their enemies. David resolves to build an elaborate temple to the Lord. There are four dimensions to this massive temple project that are relevant for us on this Vision Sunday.

First, it’s a big vision. I read earlier from 1st Chronicles 29. For the previous eight chapters, David has been detailing his extensive plans for the temple. He summarizes his big vision in the opening verse of our Scripture lesson, “The task is great because the palatial structure is not for men but for God” (29:1). This vision is so big that it will outlast David’s life. It will take David’s son Solomon to make these dreams a reality.

There are three things we can each do with our life: we can waste it, spend it or invest it. The best thing we can do with our lives is to invest in something that will outlast us.

Second, it takes generosity to make this vision a reality. The enormity of David’s offering boggles the mind. We read in verse 3, “I now give my

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personal treasures…3000 talents of gold from Orphir [meaning gold of the highest quality] and 7000 talents of refined silver.” A talent is a unit of weight, in the neighborhood of 75 pounds. David’s gift amounts to 110 tons of gold and 260 tons of silver. David is essentially giving away his 401K and stock portfolio to build this colossal temple.

Third, it’s completely voluntary. There’s nothing forced or coercive about David’s invitation to join him in this project. He asks in verse 5, “Who is willing to consecrate themselves to the Lord?” In verse 6, we read that David’s leaders give willingly. In verse 9, the people rejoice at the leaders’ willing response and join the effort.

Fourth, it starts with leaders and includes everyone. David sets the example with his extravagant gift (29:2-4). Then, the heads of families, leaders of the 12 tribes and military commanders step forward to join David in giving generously (29:6-9).

I shared this passage and idea for Vision Sunday with leaders in our church. Several said to me, “Pete, you need to tell our church what you are giving to this effort.” Really?

Chris and I join with some of you in practicing the Biblical principle called the tithe. We give ten percent of our gross income to VPC. We believe in our mission. We’re all in! This week I asked elders and staff directors to join me in this effort. They have graciously complied. We’re asking you to do likewise.

When the Holy Spirit is poured out on Jesus’ followers in the book of Acts, we’re told that the young dream dreams and the old see visions (2:17). I don’t know where this puts a middle-aged man like me but I’d like to dream awhile and imagine a few visions.
I dream of a church that has a reputation for being genuine lovers of God.

I dream of a church that loves the Lord and loves the people.

I dream of a church that is bold to declare Jesus Christ as Lord.

I dream of a church more intent on what Scripture says than what people say.

I dream of a church that is honest about personal brokenness and sin.

I dream of a church that is respectful and civil with each other.

I dream of a church that calls out backbiting and gossip.

I dream of a church willing to do the hard work of making amends with people.

I dream of a church that speaks with truth and grace into the moral confusion of our day.

I dream of a church that is multiethnic in real life and not just in publicity.

I dream of a church that places high value on the very young and very old.

I dream of a church that is saturated in prayer.

I dream of a church that makes Jesus’ great commission its central mandate.

I dream of a church that invests more of its money and time to mission.

I dream about a church that orders its life and ministry around these high ambitions.

When I envision this church, I don’t gravitate toward quantitative measurements, what might be called the ABC’s of church—attendance, buildings and cash. I am drawn to qualitative measurements that set us apart as a distinctive body of believers.
What would it be like for us to more intentionally live into this kind of community? We’ll be asking you to join our fellowship this January. Some of you haven’t joined our fellowship, perhaps because membership has been seen as something organizational and institutional rather than relational and spiritual. What if we would covenant together to live into these 14 qualitative principles? This is our way of living into our central mission of “Becoming like Christ Together for the World.”

Mission has been a hallmark of this church for years. This year, we will give $600,000 to 100 local, national and international mission projects. We invest heavily in people who have been raised in this church to do the Lord’s work as pastors, campus ministers and mission partners unto the far reaches of the globe. Maybe it’s time for us to invest more intensive involvement to five to seven projects in time and money. We can’t do everything, but we can make a difference in this area of ministry.

The Old Testament singles out three groups for special consideration: widows, orphans and aliens, what today we would call immigrants and refugees. Back in the day, these three groups were the most vulnerable. Maybe we need to invest more money and time in the hypothermia project or the elementary school less than a mile from our church with a significant immigrant population. We might take up the plight of orphans in Haiti or on the continent of Africa ravaged by Ebola.

Planting churches has also been a legacy for this congregation. We planted Centreville Presbyterian in the 1980s, Riverside in the 1990s and Brambleton in 2000s.

Let me tell you about one of these churches. We planted Riverside church in Loudoun County in 1995. This church has become one church in two languages. This English-speaking church has seeded a Spanish-speaking church within its walls. They worship next to each other in multiple languages. Since the school-age children of Spanish-speakers are more often fluent in English, their Sunday school is in English. They want everyone to worship and learn of God in their own heart-language.
It’s time for us to plant more churches! Planting new churches is one of the best evangelistic strategies in the 21st century.

To accomplish these objectives, we need your time and money. Right now, as I speak, 100 youth are meeting below our feet in the Underground. It takes lots of volunteers to provide breakfast and Christian instruction to this many students. You saw the video earlier in worship of our ministry to children. It’s labor-intensive to provide Sunday school for several hundred children.

I’m using student and children’s ministries to illustrate the point. We need your help. This year, we estimate 300,000 people will come to VPC. That’s a lot of people to welcome and care for. Will you invest your time in 2015 to help us achieve our mission?

We also need your money. Accommodating this many people is lots of wear and tear on our building. We’ll need to retool our building to invest in future ministry. We’d like to refurbish our building, redo the Underground, paint the exterior and add to our parking.

I’ve attended high-pressured, fund-raising appeals. I find them annoying. You don’t need to pressure me. Just tell the facts, please.

Let me say it as simply as I know how. If you believe in our mission and you’re not yet giving to this church, please consider supporting us with your generosity. We pass the plate each Sunday or you can go to our website on your phone to donate. As we look forward to 2015, we’re asking you to specify an amount of money you can pledge to our mission by filling out a pledge card in the pew racks or going online. We’re not going to stretch out this pledge process. We’re asking you to make a pledge between now and Sunday, December 7th. If you are already financially supporting our church, why not take it to the next level? I’m asking you to make VPC your top giving priority in 2015.

I’m asking you to dream with us. Join us in envisioning the glorious future God has in store for us at VPC. Pray with us: Lord, what do you want to do through me in the life of this church?