

JOIN HIS MOVEMENT

Acts 5:27-42

Rev. John Park

It is about 8 years since Jesus came to fill me with his Holy Spirit for the first time. At that time, as I was being filled with his love, he gave me two particular callings. It was like that moment when Paul encountered the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and was filled with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 9:15, Jesus says, "He is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel." He received the calling to go to Gentiles and preach the gospel. I had callings and the callings I received soon became my vision and mission. I surrendered myself to the Lord and dedicated my life to fulfill these visions. They are 1) I will bring young people to encounter the person of Jesus Christ; 2) I will bring young people to offer their lives for his kingdom. For these purposes, there were a series of incidents that I briefly explained to you before in my previous sermons that happened in my life that led me to pursue the ordination and become a minister. When I finally finished my studies at seminary, I was fully convinced that Oakridge Presbyterian Church could be a place where these visions could be fulfilled.

You see, I think it takes more than good intention to make dreams come true. There are a number of factors that must be present in order for a vision to become a reality. First, you need someone who sells a vision. This is someone, who can imagine something, so grand and wonderful that many become inspired. This person should have an ability to draw this vision, figuratively speaking, for others to comprehend this vision and buy this vision.

That's exactly what Jesus did. There was not a single person on the planet in our history, who was more visionary than Jesus, who had a greater vision than Jesus had. Jesus had and showed the vision that no human can ever imagine or claim. The vision he brought was the Kingdom of God. In Mark 1:15, this is Jesus' first words: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." In Acts 1:3, this is his last days on earth: "After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God." He continuously preached about the Kingdom of God and he called his followers to pursue this vision, this Kingdom of God. Matthew 6:33 says, "Strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Luke 16:16 says, "The Law and the Prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force."

It's pretty clear that he didn't come to simply save our lives and make us live selfishly in our own circle of eternity. He came to save us, so that we may go out and bring the Kingdom of God from eternity into the lives of ours and others. When you accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you are also called into sharing and pursuing this vision.

This brings me to my second point: you not only need a strong advocate, but you need followers for a vision to come true. For a vision to come true, you need FOLLOWERS. You see, Jesus had many fans, who were cheering and supporting the vision he had cast. But, they are not the ones who were carrying out the missions involved in fulfilling the vision of the Kingdom. They were the disciples, or Apostles and committed followers, who were willing to give their lives for the sake of God's Kingdom and his righteousness. It was one thing to agree intellectually and another thing to give your life to the vision.

Many of you already know this story, but I think it's a good illustration of what I'm trying to say. *Jean-Francois Gravelet (1824-1897), better known as Blondin, was a famous tightrope walker and acrobat. He was perhaps best known for his many crossings of a tightrope 1,100 feet (335m) in length suspended 160 feet (50m) above Niagara Falls. His act would be watched by large crowds and began with a relatively simple crossing using a balancing pole. Then he would throw the pole away and begin to amaze the onlookers. On one occasion in 1860, a Royal party from Britain went to watch Blondin perform. He crossed the tightrope on stilts, then blindfolded; next he stopped halfway to cook and eat an omelette. He then wheeled a wheelbarrow from one side to the other as the crowd cheered. He put up a sack of potatoes into the wheelbarrow and wheeled that across. The crowd cheered louder. Then he approached the Royal party and asked the Duke of Newcastle, 'Do you believe that I could take a man across the tightrope in this wheelbarrow?' 'Yes I do,' said the Duke. 'Hop in!' replied Blondin. The crowd fell silent, but the Duke of Newcastle would not accept Blondin's challenge. 'Is there anyone else here who believes I could do it?' asked Blondin. No one was willing to volunteer. Eventually, an old woman stepped out of the crowd and climbed into the wheelbarrow. Blondin wheeled her all the way across and all the way back. The old woman was Blondin's mother, the only person willing to put her life in his hands.*

What Jesus is inviting us into is like what Blondin did to the crowd. "Hop in!" Don't just stand there, but hop in! This is what distinguishes followers from fans. Blondin's mother was willing to put her life in the hands of Blondin, because she was his family member. When we join into God's household, he's asking to put our trust in his hands. It looks risky and dangerous, but if we put our trust in the Lord, we will get there.

But, again, it's one thing to be inspired by a great vision and another thing to work for the vision. This is certainly a worthy and noble vision. God wants to be reconciled with the world in his Son, and in Jesus Christ he wants to establish an eternal kingdom where his love and righteousness reign over us. God is driving out injustice, sickness, death and Satan, and he is cleaning the platform to come and sit in his throne. Jesus says, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out" (John 12:31). In another reading, he says, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16:14-18). You will immediately realize how unrealistic and overwhelming this vision sounds like to us. I mean, we are talking about preaching the good news,

driving out Satan, ending injustice and poverty, bringing healing and resurrection power in our midst. I mean, we can easily say, "Never mind the world or even my church; I'm struggling with my own problem." You know, I think that's a starting point.

In the book of Ezekiel, God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel and said that the Israelites at the time were like dry bones in his sight. They were dead for a long time, not moving nor making any sound. They were just quiet and dead. Maybe some of you feel you are like that; nothing but dry, motionless, dead. Then, there were those who were without the Spirit of God. Ezekiel says, "So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise... but there was no breath in them." Some of you may do so many things, making all kinds of noise and sound, but maybe you are going through the motions, having no breath.

I know exactly what these words mean, because I'm often in these conditions. As I said, it's good to start with yourself, and I'm going to start with myself. I would like to make public confession about my own sins and my own shortcomings. First of all, I confess I have disappointed many. I have not often been accountable to what has been assigned to me. For instance, I feel terribly sorry for all the youth and young adults that have come under my care in the last years. I have not been a good shepherd to them. I have not tended and fed them, as the Lord has called me, and I here ask forgiveness from the Lord and the church and those who have been affected by my ministry. Do you know what has been bothering me the most? There was one Sunday when I came upstairs from teaching youth and the service in the Sanctuary was still going. But, there was this young girl waiting out in the Narthex. I asked if she's okay. She said she was waiting for the service to be over, because her mom was in the service. I asked why she was not in the service. There, she unpacked her feelings towards the church. She thought the church was full of hypocrites, and she could tell this when she looked at her mom and her friends. I then said that is not the first reason why I come to the church on Sunday morning. I said I come to meet the God who is only perfect and wonderful. She became very interested and said she wanted to hear more. As I began to explain about God's love in Jesus, her mother came out to look for her daughter. When she discovered the daughter was talking with me, she quickly came and took the daughter's arm and said they needed to go. The daughter got upset and said she wanted to listen to me. But, the mother wouldn't allow and walked away with the daughter. Then, I saw the daughter again in the Western campus when I was walking to pray for the campus. There, I didn't go talk to her, because I thought I was busy in praying. This has never left my mind. How could I think I was busy in praying to the Lord, who considers one life more worthy than the whole world (c.f. Matthew 16:26).

Also, I want to confess my weaknesses. I do not have the gift of administration and organization, because of my lack of organization, many things in our church, I confess, sometimes didn't go well or failed. You all know, the plan to visit China for a mission trip didn't happen, and it was mainly due to my lack of planning and organization. It forced the church and session to be in a difficult place. Furthermore, my lack of organization and communication confused many in our youth ministry. It often lacked the communication of clear directions, did not nurture our youth and volunteers, and distanced some youth. There is no way I can compensate the harm I have caused, but I want to sincerely apologize before my God and the congregation. I shared this privately with Rev. Ed, but I

want to be transparent; due to my weaknesses, I have been considering a resignation for a long time, because I believe this church can be far stronger with the right person.

I'm inviting you to confess your own sins, wrongdoings and weaknesses. That's the only way you and I can be healed. James says, "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). There is something in being vulnerable that brings healing and power. In Ezekiel, when the dry bones come to the Lord as who they are, the Holy Spirit came into them; it says, "and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast [army]." When you come into the presence of the Lord, His Holy Spirit can do only what He can do.

This brings me to my third point; we need the Holy Spirit to move and work among us to bring His Kingdom. I want to be numbered as one of those soldiers in His army, and I feel particularly called to be on the frontier of reaching out to our young generation. I strongly believe that God has an incredible plan for this generation and I've dedicated my life to see this generation rising up to take their place in the Kingdom of God. But, it is only my wishful thinking, unless this idea is conceived, birthed, raised and nurtured by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's just read verse 29, it says, "But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.'" How can the disciples be so bold like this? It's the Holy Spirit who God has given to those who obey him. In other words, Jesus didn't simply inspire his followers by brilliant speech. He gave His Spirit into the hearts of those who dedicate their lives for His Kingdom, and it is the Holy Spirit that empowers us and gives us authority. In Acts 1:8, Jesus says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In fact, Jesus specifically told his disciples not to do anything until the Holy Spirit came upon them. It's not these instruments or good music that gives us power; it's the Holy Spirit that works through music that gives us power. It's not our emotions or feelings of satisfaction in music styles that give us power; it's the Holy Spirit that gives us power. It's not my sermon that gives us power; it's the Holy Spirit that works through the Word of God that gives us power.

And this brings me to my last point. The vision of the Kingdom of God begins with worship. Worship is where we encounter the presence of God, experience His power and love, and receive His forgiveness and grace, where everything begins and everything ends. God created us to worship him (c.f. Isaiah 43:21) and the final scene of heaven in Revelation is portrayed as our worship and praise to God. He called his Israelites out of Egypt to worship him. The first thing that was restored in Jerusalem in the period of exile was the temple, a place of worship. In John 4:23, Jesus says, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him." I want to reach young people and the most unchurched generation, and as much as it sounds odd and strange, I truly believe it has to begin with worship. Throughout history, from Pentecost in the early church to today's revival in Africa and Asia, it

has always been worship that was the starting point and core of awakening each generation, and I want to see our worship be the starting point and core of awakening in our generation today here in London.

In today's reading, Gamaliel makes a very good point. From verse 35 he says, "Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared. After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them – in that case you may even be found fighting against God!" I think this is true for any revival or any significant movement. If it's from God, no one can stop it. If it's from humans, it will eventually die and fail. This is why I would like to begin this movement with worship, because I do not want to create anything of human origin in this movement. There have been a number of prayer meetings for this particular Sunday morning, and we all prayed that the worship style won't become the focus of worship, but God's glory will be. Every time when our praise team came together, we began with reading the Scripture and praying, and we were uniting our hearts in one idea, which is that God be the centre of our worship, not our worship style or our talents. It's about giving God his appropriate place in this movement and this vision, and I do not want to create any barriers that hinder young people from experiencing the power of Jesus' name.

Remember the story of the friends who brought a paralytic to Jesus by breaking the roof and lowering him on a mat? That's sometimes what could happen in the church. Luke 5:18 says, "Some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus." The crowd gathered to hear the teaching from Jesus, and they really loved his teaching and his presence; so, they came closer to Jesus, not wanting to lose their places. This created the paralytic – the one who needed to see Jesus the most – and friends to be able to come to the Lord. When we love what we are doing so much, we can unconsciously push some people out and we don't even know we are doing it. I have come across many young people, who left our church with bitterness, and every time I talk to them, they talk about how the church did not care about their generation. And I'm sorry to drop this bomb of contemporary worship style on those who are uncomfortable with this music style, but I am trying to see if I can rip open the roof of our Sanctuary and see if I can bring young people to the cross. I am not arguing contemporary worship style is better than other worship styles. Frankly, I don't give a rip. But, if the style of presentation is losing its relevance to the culture of this generation, hindering the younger generation from seeing the content, I am not fulfilling the vision God has given me for this generation. Don't we look closely at the content of a card, when we receive a very elegant and beautifully designed card? I have to meet our youth group every Friday evening, struggling to find a way to make God's word relevant to them. Somehow, when it comes to worship, instead of calling it relevant, we call it entertainment. I have to tell you: I have seen more genuine, sincere and authentic worship in young people who are worshipping in contemporary worship style. I personally meet with

some of these young people and I learn more from them, because they sincerely try to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ in their lives, and they don't hold back anything when it comes to worshipping him in service.

Acts 15:16 says, "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord – even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called." Don't you find it interesting that God wants to restore the 'dwelling of David'? It's referring to the tabernacle built in David's palace. But, why did the prophet say the dwelling of David? His son, Solomon built the better place for worship, Solomon's Temple. Or if he meant the tabernacle, not Temple, why did he say the dwelling of David, not Moses, who was the one who first built it and should have the most credit? Or if he's talking about David's family line or his kingdom, then why didn't he say 'David's throne' or David's kingdom'? I think it's not the tabernacle God wants to restore, but it's David's attitude of worship he showed in worship that God wants to restore in our generation. I want it to be restored in our generation, and I am willing to break any barrier out there that might hinder young people from coming to the cross and giving all of themselves to the Lord in worship.

I'm not arguing my way is the best; I know I have flaws, and that's why I need you, and I'm here to put my vision on trial, for you to decide if you want to hop in. I do not believe there is one perfect solution that solves all; there are many different solutions that have pros and cons. We have to discern these pros and cons and prayerfully consider what is most needed for the church. What's our priority? What's at stake? What are we willing to sacrifice and let go? And I'm asking you to discern these questions prayerfully and provide your feedback on the survey we make available after the service on a hard copy or online. I thank those who are willing to be honest and have crucial conversations with me. I am leaving it in the hands of God, and I believe in whichever direction and decision we make there is God's will, for the Bible says, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed by Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Forever and ever. Amen.