

For Christ and His Kingdom

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
Autumn Ridge Church, Rochester, MN
January 30-31, 2010

Scripture: John 17:20-26

Around this time each year the President gives a State of the Union Address, Governors give a State of the State Address, and pastors give a State of the Church Address.

At Autumn Ridge we call this Vision Weekend.

It is an opportunity for us to reflect on three tremendous truths.

These are: God's goodness to our church in the past,
Jesus' mandate for our church in the present,
And the Spirit's leading for our church in the future.

So let's begin by reflecting on **God's Goodness to Our Church**

Some of God's blessings are described in our Pictorial Annual Report. Do read it with joy and thanksgiving.

This is Autumn Ridge's version of the Acts of the Apostles.

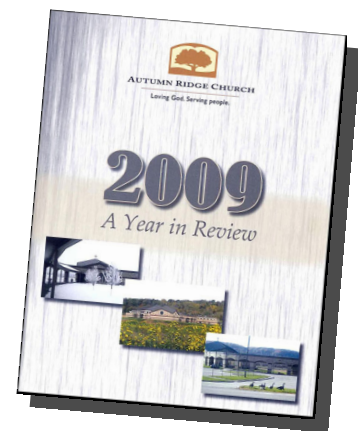
It tells how God has been at work among us.

A few months ago Bill Price was reviewing with the Elders what has been happening at our church.

He told story after story of the grand things that God is doing.

At the conclusion he asked a question, "What do we call this?"

He suggested the best description is the word "revival".



In the 20 years I have been at Autumn Ridge we have often prayed for revival. But what do we imagine that revival looks like? We know that in a fallen world it can't be when everything is perfect and problem free.

Rather revival is the time when people come to Christ and live out their faith. Revival is when Christians are excited about studying God's word and serving others.

Revival is when there is a spirit of joy and unity.

Well brothers and sisters those things are happening at Autumn Ridge. Let me give you some of the highlights of 2009

65 people confessed their faith in Christ in the waters of baptism. 90 new members were welcomed.

Our membership now stands at 1356.

Over 140 of our folk took part in short term missions.

In a recession year our giving went up by nearly 9 percent.

In my wildest dreams I never imagined being a part of a church like this. With Habakkuk we say, **"I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord." (Habakkuk 3:2)**

Second, Vision Weekend is the time to reflect on **Jesus' mandate for our church.**

Let us remember that Christ is the head of this fellowship.

It is his vision that matters.

So what is Jesus mandate for us?

We find out in John chapter 17. This is part of Jesus' great High Priestly prayer that he made in the Upper Room just before he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus begins by praying for himself.

He then prays for his 12 disciples.

Finally he prays for all believers, including us.

Here we find Jesus' desire for Autumn Ridge Church.

First **Jesus wants us to enjoy unity.**

Listen to this: **"I pray . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you . . . may they be brought to complete unity."** (John 17:20-23)

Jesus wants us to have the close, intimate and delightful unity that he and the Father and the Holy Spirit enjoy.

Now think that what sort of divine unity means.

It means we will care for one another, pray for one another, meet each others needs and serve one another.

That is happening. Let me give you an example.

Our young marrieds class are getting together on Sunday night in the Timothy Chapel to pray for two couples in their group who are going through a difficult time.

This depth of unity is very attractive.

Deep down in our souls we all want it.

Unity is a powerful witness to the grace of God.

Jesus knows this which is why he prays to his Father, **"May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."** (v 21)

Second **Jesus wants us to see his glory.**

He prays, **"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."** (v 24)

Now let's understand what Jesus is asking here.

In heaven he was surrounded with extraordinary glory.

He laid aside that glory when he was born in Bethlehem.

But he wants us to see him as he really is in all his power and splendor. And one day we shall, when we gather around the throne of the Lamb.

But it is possible to see something of his glory now.

That happens when we see Jesus working in great power.

Now it takes great faith to see great glory.

If we allow our faith to trudge along this year we won't see much glory. But if we really trust God and we risk everything on him. Then we find him answering bold prayers, meeting deep needs and using us in great ways.

That is when we see his glory.

Third, **Jesus wants us to know the Father's love.**

"Righteous Father . . . I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." (v 25-26)

Jesus came to earth to make God known.

He said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

He wants us to know his Father better this year.

Because when we know the Father we experience the Father's love and that love overcomes the world, that love casts out fear that love is able to forgive.

So that is Jesus' mandate for our church.

When you look at the various things we do when we come together whether that is worship or service or small groups or Bible study they are all helping us to enjoy the Spirit's unity, see the Son's glory and know the Father's love.

That leads us to the third purpose for a Vision Weekend which is to reflect on **The Spirit's leading for our church.**

At this time I would like you to open your bulletin where you will find a document titled **For Christ and His Kingdom.**

A three-year development plan for Autumn Ridge Church.

This is where your church leadership believes the Spirit of God is taking us. Now how do we know this?

First we ask the Holy Spirit to give us receptivity to his voice.

Second we look at scripture to make sure the ideas are in accordance with God's word.

Third we seek to interpret God's providence.

We ask what opportunities is God presenting to us right now that we can seize for his glory?

So let me give you an overview of this plan for Christ and His Kingdom.

It begins with **Our Mission.**

Here it is: **"The purpose of Autumn Ridge Church is to develop disciples of Jesus Christ who love God and serve people."**

That mission comes straight from scripture.

When Jesus was asked what is the most important commandment he replied, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. . . and love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:30-31)**

Supporting that mission we have **six values** which are articulated here. “We believe that a disciple who loves God will value the **scripture**, commune with God in **worship**, and grow in their faith through intentional **discipleship**.

We believe that a disciple who serves people will live in **community** with other believers, will seek to identify their giftedness for **service**, and will mirror God’s own **compassion** for the world.”

Every six months we are spending six weeks looking at one of these values. In the last year we looked at *The Splendor of Scripture* and *The Wonder of Worship*.

Next week we begin a new six week series on Dynamic Discipleship.

We now move on to **Our Vision** which is made up of four parts.

Much of this is self-explanatory, so I won’t cover all of it today. But I do want to draw your attention to a few areas so that you may catch something of the excitement we have about this document.

Part one is **Extend worship beyond the weekend event**.

We want to be daily worshippers because God made us to worship him not just on weekends but every day of our life.

1 B is to **explore opportunities for off-site worship evangelism**.

We want to take our church into the world.

This could include our choir or band singing and playing at Apache Mall. It could mean taking youth worship teams to the prison or to retirement or nursing homes.

This is where you come in. You may be aware of places that would welcome a worship team from Autumn Ridge.

1 C is to **establish a church-wide prayer ministry**.

Now this church has been praying for 153 years.

There is not a meeting that takes place here without prayer.

But we want to develop and deepen our prayer life.

We will have some staff reorganization this year that you can read about in the report you will be given at the Future Direction meetings. This summer Gary Seaquist will be moving to part-time to focus on Celebrate Recovery.

Karen Anderle is going to move into the area of Congregational Care and she will head up this church-wide prayer ministry.

I am enormously excited about this.

Karen has a passion and giftedness in prayer.

About five percent of you are intercessors.

That means prayer is your primary spiritual gift.

I hope you are going to connect with Karen.

We want to send prayer teams out into this community.

They can go to folk in the hospital or to people’s homes.

They can go wherever they are invited and maybe some place where they are not.

A pastor friend of mine serves a small congregation in a city center. On Saturday afternoon his prayer team set up some chairs on the High Street and they offer to pray for passers by. He says it is amazing how many people ask to be prayed for.

They have seen God do some great things that have led to some wonderful, spiritual conversations.

We want to use the Elizabeth Lodge for prayer retreats and as a place where people can come and learn to pray.

The Elizabeth Lodge is a fantastic resource for us.

This weekend 20 women are at the Lodge worshipping and praying together as small group leaders.

The second part of our vision is to **create a culture of service and compassion.**

This already exists but we want to expand it.

I want to just focus on one aspect of this which is to **complete two operating rooms at the Compassion Evangelical Hospital in Guinea and begin sending medical personnel and mission teams.**

We have already heard about this on the video.

It is one of the items we will be voting on in our Sharing Hope Campaign at the Future Direction meeting that follows this service.

Autumn Ridge has already given over \$184,000 to the Compassion Evangelical Hospital.

The cost of the two operating rooms is another \$150,000.

This money will be given first in our capital campaign because we want these operating rooms up and running as soon as possible.

There are children and adults who will die this week in Guinea because those operating rooms aren't there. When they are in place, fully equipped and staffed, those children and adults will live.

They will hear the gospel. Many will become followers of Christ.

Let me tell you about the impact a hospital like this can have.

In the neighboring country of the Ivory Coast there is a similar Christian hospital that has been operating for five decades.

A survey taken in that country, shows that 50 percent of the believers there became Christians directly or indirectly through that hospital.

For 20 years we have been praying for the Maninka people of Guinea and supporting missionaries working to establish a church among them. There has not been a lot of fruit. This hospital is bang in the middle of Maninka territory and we pray there will be a spiritual breakthrough because of its ministry of physical and spiritual healing.

The third part of our vision is to **commit to effective local evangelism.**

This is Jesus' vision for his church when he told us to go into all the world starting in our Jerusalem.

Many of us are Christians today because someone in this congregation shared the good news of the gospel with us.

Now we recognize that we are not the only Christian church or group in Rochester and so we want to cooperate with others in this great task of reaching our community for Christ.

We will **partner with Next Chapter in outreach opportunities**. They are doing an amazing job going into the jails and helping men and women when they come out of prison. They have developed a ministry among children and youth who are at risk. They need our help and we need their passion.

Another part of vision for evangelism is to **actively promote the ministry of Autumn Ridge Church in our community so that people of Olmsted County know what God is doing here and how they can join us**.

We have discovered that Autumn Ridge is a well kept secret. Many people in this community don't know we exist.

That is a shame because this is Christ's church and we want them to know him and the power of his resurrection.

Our desire is summed up by Jesus' words, **"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)**

We are not interested in blowing our trumpet but God's trumpet. Jesus says when our light shines, people will praise our Father in heaven.

Now how can we let our shine?

Let's use all the means of technology that is at our disposal.

Let me encourage those of you who like to make videos to come up with some really great gospel ideas that can go on YouTube. Millions of people can see these all around the world for free.

Let's use Facebook and Blogs to help people see the spiritual realities all around them. If you use Twitter find a way to express your faith in 140 characters.

Then we would love to **start a Hispanic daughter church in Rochester**. We have been talking about this on and off for years and finally we are saying, "Let's make it happen."

An increasing number of Hispanics have moved into our community and we want to welcome them.

Some of you speak Spanish.

You can take the lead in this endeavor.

At my last church in Los Angeles we started a Hispanic congregation because we realized that a lot of our neighbors would not come to an English speaking service because they could not understand all that was going on.

It was a tremendous adventure for that church and I believe it can be for us at Autumn Ridge.

The fourth part of our vision is **develop the discipleship of families, children and students.**

4 A is to **develop plans for "The Center" to facilitate children's discipleship and student ministry outreach.**

We have been hearing about The Center for a couple of months through the excellent presentations by Jim Maher and Steve Merry.

This will be one of the most important decisions we will make at the Future Direction meeting following this service.

You have heard the vision and now we have to decide if we will go ahead and do it.

We began thinking about this a year ago when space in our nursery and children's department was tight.

As you heard on the video the move to Enhanced Emmaus has relieved the space crunch and we think we have bought ourselves two or three years.

But if we are committed to evangelism and we let our light shine before the world and we create a culture of service and compassion, others will join us and we need to plan to have space for them.

However we need the large multi-purpose room right now.

We have needed it since we have moved here four years ago.

Its absence has hurt our ministry. We had a gym in our old building that was used by every group in the church.

About 10 percent of the time it was used for recreation.

The remainder was used for everything from men's breakfast to Oasis lunches, to youth events. We had hoped to include it in stage one of this building but we had to remove it because of the cost.

The leadership of the church are absolutely committed to this project and I am delighted to tell you that **\$634,000** has already been pledged by our leaders.

I can envision hundreds of ways this large multipurpose room will be used but the one really touches me is the need to reach boys.

We are losing boys and young men because we have nowhere for them to let off steam.

Back on 16th Street boys would come on a Monday night and play basketball. Then perspiring heavily they would go to the Bible study. Because they were exhausted they would listen. Following that they would go back to the gym and play again while the helpers refueled them with treats from our kitchen.

Right now we can't do that.

Boys who have been sitting in school all day are invited to come along to church and sit some more. And they are staying away.

I want boys and young men to look forward to coming to church as I did when I was their age because we had a place to play and show off to the girls.

So I am going to plead with you to vote **yes** for The Center.
Then I am going to ask you to support your vote in March with a generous three year pledge.

Perhaps we are wondering is this a good time to build?

I have been in church ministry over 30 years and I can tell you there is never a good time to build.

But there is God's time to build. We believe this is it.

Yes our country is in recession but that means that interest rates are low and construction costs are less.

There are some encouraging signs in our local economy.

Hormel just reported 20 percent increase in their profits last year. The Mayo Clinic exceeded its capital campaign of raising 1.25 billion dollars by raising 1.3 billion a year and half ahead of schedule. Now if a place of physical healing can do that, why not the church of Jesus Christ which specializes in spiritual healing?

So this is where we believe the Holy Spirit is leading our church.
Let me close with three observations.

First, **This won't happen without you.**

I have run through this plan because I hope that one item in it may have aroused your interest and you say "That's exactly what I have been waiting for."

If so I want you to contact our Executive Pastor, Bill Price this week. Call him or send him an email.

Tell him to count you in. We would like to form a series of Task Forces who can start to tackle these projects.

Second, **some of these things may not happen.**

As we examine some of them we will find this isn't the right time or we don't have the right people.

That's alright. We want to be bold.

We would rather reach too far than not reach at all.

Third, **other things not mentioned here will happen.**

We have a God of surprises. He is going to do things in the next three years that we haven't imagined yet.

In my 20 years here I have noticed that most of the really good ideas have come out of the blue.

Often from church members to whom God has given a vision.

They come and talk to the pastors and share their idea and we get excited and we take it to the Elders and they get excited.

We bring it to you as a congregation and you get excited.

That is how Next Chapter started. That is how our involvement with Compassion Evangelical Hospital started.

We believe in the priesthood of all believers.

That means you are all ministers of the gospel and that means that good and godly ideas come from you.

Together we will work for Christ and His Kingdom.