

Still A Vision? November 4, 2007

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; II Thessalonians 1:1-4,11-12; Luke 19:1-10; Psalm 119:137-144

As I thought about our readings for this morning I found myself puzzling over a series of questions.

Defining the word “vision” as unusual discernment or foresight,” I wondered about the world we are living in, both the world that is right at hand and the larger world. I also recalled the wise words from one of the Proverbs that reminds us, “Where there is no vision, the people perish...”

I asked myself, “Is there a vision for our world?” “Is there a vision for our nation?” “Is there a vision for our larger community?” “Is there a vision for our community of faith?”

For me, having a vision means that we have a goal toward which we should be moving—sometimes haltingly, sometimes quickly but always moving forward. After a lot of thought, I did arrive at some answers to my questions. Some of them were disappointing, especially when I contemplated the larger scene. The world is still turning on its axis as the days and years roll by. But, have we learned anything from our past mistakes and triumphs? Have we gained new insights into what will eventually constitute world peace? Is there still a vision as we lurch forward and backward and from side to side?

The lesser prophet Habakkuk, upon surveying his world, believed that God told him there was. All around him was a scene of destruction, yet the voice of God came to him to encourage and support him and to move him forward to help those around him sense what the world could become. The vision was of a world in which the nation Israel would be united, under God, and which would know God’s will and way for it.

Uniting people in the pursuit of this goal was something all the prophets tried to do through the words they believed came to them from God. They sought to pull people together in a common vision for the future. Richard Livingstone wrote, “An eternal trait of men [and women] is the need for vision and the readiness to follow it; and if [people] are not given the right vision, they will follow wandering fires.” The prophets sought a right vision.

In Jesus the vision was clarified and extended to all. In our little story of Zaccheaus, the disliked tax collector, Jesus tried to lure those around him into expanding their concept of what it meant to live as the children of God. In that vision, there was acceptance and love and no judgment leveled against others. What a person did or did not do to earn a living was not to be the measure of his or her worth. What a person was at the center of his or her being was what mattered. At the center God should dwell and if God did, then the nature of our Creator would be reflected through the words and deeds of humans. Just as God was reflected through Jesus, God should be reflected through his followers. This is a vision worthy of pursuit. It was the vision Jesus sought to share with all comers, including you and me.

This vision lived beyond his days and years into the vision Paul developed and wrote about to those who read his letters.

The Second Letter to the Thessalonians was written to encourage those Greek followers of the new way to keep the vision alive as they faced difficult persecution and as they awaited the return of Christ. Encouraging these small churches was a major theme in all the letters, both those written by Paul and by others. There was always the danger that hassles within and without these tiny bodies of Christ might cause them to disband and lose sight of their mission to spread the Good News found in the life and teachings of Christ. The letters sought to renew and reaffirm the zeal of those early followers so that Christ had not lived in vain. We need to always remember that no gospels existed in the early years, just the letters that circulated among the churches. I Thessalonians is believed to be the earliest New Testament book. Second Thessalonians was not far behind.

So, back to my earlier questions. Is there a right vision for our world, our nation? Our answers would probably differ in regard to this question and I am sure we might have some lively discussions about them. Is there a vision for our larger community? I believe that there is one that is slowly developing as groups here realize the wisdom of working together. Is there one for this community of faith? Of course, I believe there is. It is a vision of hope for the future. It is a vision that is developed and accomplished slowly but surely, ever expanding as people come to realize what the work of the body of Christ is all about.

That work is about the relationships we develop one with another and with God—relationships based on the love, forgiveness, patience, understanding and forbearance Jesus displayed to us. Let us contemplate those ties that so tenderly bind us together as we prepare to gather at the Lord's table. -- Amen