

Habakkuk 2:1-3

“Write the Vision, Make It Plain”

September 25, 2011 Maple Grove UMC

God gave Noah a vision of devastating worldwide flood and of how to escape it. So while it was still sunny, not yet a cloud in the sky, Noah started to build an ark, a giant boat in which to rescue life on earth. It's often suggested that Noah's neighbors may have laughed at him, thought him crazy, but people of vision are not deterred by critics and naysayers.

Centuries later, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Habakkuk: “Write the vision; make it plain,” so plain that a runner can read it from far away. “If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.” That is the spiritual work of having vision—not to grow impatient, not to think it up on our own, but to wait for it, to listen, to receive it from God. Well, I haven't waited long, but I do have at least a provisional vision to share with you this morning. I have written it, and made it as plain as I know how. Thank you, Habakkuk!

But first, you might ask, what is this vision thing, anyway? The mission statement, we've seen, is in just a few words, your purpose, what

above everything else God has called you to *do*. Our mission statement is fourteen words long and everyone knows it by heart. The mission of Maple Grove Church is: *to be an open community of Christians who love God and serve our neighbors*. It's what we do.

The vision is what we dream of becoming, where we're going. The Vision is what things will look like if we live our mission; if we really do what God is calling us to do, here's what people will see. The Vision is a picture not of the way the church looks now, but the way God wants it to look.

When Disney World first opened, Walt Disney's wife, Lillian, was asked to speak at the Grand Opening, since Walt had died. She was introduced by a man who said, "Mrs. Disney, I just wish Walt could have seen all this." She stood up and said, "He did," and sat down.^a

Years ago I wrote a poem called *Grandma's Eyes*:

Grandma shrank when the old tree fell—
Not cried, not shook, but shrank inside.
Grandpa had planted it to shade the kitchen
Where she worked, the tree of his love.
Their children climbed in it before it was big.
Later we grandkids, we swung from that tree—
Two swings of rope, as high as God
And nearly as scary, in that tree of life.

But it died, it rotted, we cut it down,
Sawed it up, and burned the stump.

And Grandma shrank inside.

She was eighty years old when that tree came down;
At eighty-one she planted a sapling, an oak,
Full of promise, but so slow to grow.

“Why, Grandma,” we asked, “another tree?
The kitchen has air now, the kids are all grown.
Why waste the money, the water, the toil?”

“Because,” she said, “there will be children,
children to climb and children to swing.”

“But before it gets big, you will be gone.
You will never see them climb and swing.”

“But, oh,” Grandma said, not shrunken now,
Just more solid, “I already see them.

I already see.”

O Grandma, you lonesome planter of trees,
What else do you see?

What else do you see?

That’s what Vision is--acting today on the basis of what you see for tomorrow. Vision gives direction and focus—we do some things and we don’t do others depending on whether they move us toward the Vision.

Vision challenges and inspires. It's so easy to get caught up leading not out of vision, but out of anxiety. Attendance is down, giving is down, it's hard to get volunteers—oh dear, maybe we'd better criticize people and guilt them into doing and giving more. That'll help, won't it? That's anxiety, and I've got plenty of it. But Vision doesn't drive people from behind with a stick; Vision draws people forward with hope and possibility.

One other quick thing before we start. A Vision is not the same as a strategic plan. The Vision is where you're going; the plan is how to get there. And let's be clear: whatever vision we settle on, it's going to take a lot of planning, a lot of strategy, and a lot of work to get there. So as I share the Vision today, if you find yourself wanting to interrupt, "That sounds great, Pastor, but how are we going to do that? How are going to make that happen?" I'll sign you up for the strategic planning committee down the road! First the Vision, then the plan. Martin Luther King Jr. did not stand on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and proclaim, "I have a plan." He said, "I have a dream."^b Vision inspires.

The vision I'm about to share has come from three sources:

1) Reviewing the "Micah 2" plans from a few years ago, 2) the dreams you shared with me at small group gatherings over the past several weeks,

and--I hope-- 3) God whispering in my ear. It's still provisional, but I have written the vision and made it as clear as I know how.

And here it is: **Oh My God, Every member's in ministry! Or for short, **O M G Every** member in ministry!**

The **O** is for an **Outward Focus**. Here's the picture: It's easy to think of the church as a circle of people, hand in hand, facing one another in fellowship and love. And that's good. We all need that love and attention; the church requires some inward focus. But a theologically truer picture of the church is a circle of people, hand in hand, facing out towards a world in need. As important as it is to teach and nurture and care for one another within the church (and it *is* important), the church exists primarily not for those already a part of it; the church exists primarily for those who are not part of it yet. It's an *outward* focus.

Now, more than most churches I know Maple Grove already has an outward focus. This building hosts countless community groups and events. We have dozens of ministry teams serving at places like CRC and New Life Church and the Southside Free Store. Just today 200 people are walking in solidarity with Rev. Croy to combat ALS disease. Vision does not complaining about what is; it's the ability to see even more.

An outward focus might mean less focus on getting other people into the church and more on getting the church out to where people are. An outward focus might mean not just serving people, but building relationships with people. An outward focus means offering programs for children that are convenient and attractive not so much for the families already here, but for families that aren't. Without ever ceasing the fellowship and care we need, what if we did our planning and giving, what if we said our benediction facing out, not in? I see a circle of people, hand in hand, facing out towards a world in need. Can you see it too?

The **M** is for **Multigenerational**. One of the things I heard over and over again in the small groups was a desire to have more children and youth in the church, and for our young people to be more involved. Let me tell you, when the superintendent called and told me I'd be coming to Maple Grove, the very first thing that came into my mind was a picture of this location, with Indian Springs Elementary, and Whetstone HS, and Dominion Middle School, and Colerain Elementary—all close, almost within walking distance. And I began to salivate about reaching children and youth at my new church. It's what I saw, even before I got here.

The vision I hear from people is not so much reaching more and more people under thirty by having special ministries for them at special times. That's a fine vision and groups like Xenos do it well. But it's not our vision. Our vision is to be, as our mission statement puts it, *an open community of Christians*--that is, a community that's open and attractive to people of all ages. Children need grandmas and grandpas in the faith. Senior citizens need the energy and vitality of teenagers. We're a family, not a people segregated by age.

Here's how one person put it: I want to see my grandchildren grow up at Maple Grove. Another said, I'd love to see my daughter married here. I want to see . . . They're using vision language. I see it too—a church for all ages, all of us learning and loving and serving together.

It's a Vision with which few could find fault. But let's be up front. When it does come to strategic planning for how to reach and retain all those young people we've envisioned, it will probably take some things not everyone is excited about. With young people come technology, and new ideas, and yes, different styles of music. There will likely be disagreements and tension. That's why a shared vision is critical. The things we may disagree about are means, not ends, if our Vision is to reach people of all

ages. I see a truly multigenerational church, where people of all ages worship and pray and serve together. Can you see it too?

The **G** is for a **growing church**. It came up at every single group: “I’d like our sanctuary to be filled with people. At both services.” “I want Maple Grove to be busy and bustling with people.” Even though people like the fellowship and sense of family of a smaller church, they do want to be part of a growing church.

Now there are several reasons people may dream of a growing church. For some people, it’s sentimentality, hearkening back to the glory days when the church was full. What a wonderful time the fifties must have been. But that is precious memory, not Vision.

Other people want the church to get more members so we’ll have enough people to keep things going and enough money to pay the bills. And I pray for that too. But that’s survival, not Vision.

The Vision of a growing church sees people who need the Lord. There are people all around us every day who are desperately lonely. There are people all around us every day longing for forgiveness, looking for ways to serve, who have a God-sized hole in their hearts and don’t

know how to fill it. Offer them Christ, offer them love, offer them prayer, and the church will grow. Evangelism—reaching new people for Christ—has become a bad word in the Mainline church. But I intend to rehabilitate it. And day by day, says the book of Acts, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. I can see it. Can you see it too?

And finally, **E** is for: **Every Member in Ministry**. That too is vision language. Every Member in Ministry is in part a way of being church, an organizing principle. But above all it's an aspiration, a vision—not for the pastor to be in ministry, not just for certain people to be in ministry, but for *every* member to be in ministry. Maple Grove has made great strides toward this vision over the past five or six years. And I hope we've learned to expand our understanding of what it means to be in ministry. It's not just serving on a committee. It's teaching, it's feeding, it's Stephen Ministering and taking blood pressures. And when you're caring for a new baby at home or tending to an elderly parent, that's ministry too, and the church should support you in that. But despite all our progress, I suspect we could look around and notice that not quite *every* member is in ministry. But I can see that. Can you see it too?

Habakkuk cried, “Write the vision. Make it plain.” Well, it’s just a provisional vision. It’s open to dialogue and improvement. But it’s written. And I hope it’s plain. The vision is: **O M G Every Member’s in Ministry:**

Outward Focus

Multigenerational

Growing

Every member in ministry

Some day when she’s grown one of the children here today will look around Maple Grove and marvel at what an outwardly focused, multigenerational, growing church it is with every member in ministry. And she will say, “I just wish those people back when I was a little girl could have seen all this.” To which we will reply, “Ah, we did. We see it already.”

O M G Every Member’s in Ministry: an **O**utwardly focused, **M**ultigenerational, **G**rowing church where **E**very member is in ministry. I can see it. Can you see it too?

^a John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader within You*, 143.

^b John C. Maxwell, *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect*.