

September 17, 2006

“For Such a Time as This – The Necessity of Vision”
Esther 4:14

FCF: Not pursuing the purpose God has for us

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Recognizing that God has purposefully ordained all aspects of our lives,
(magnet) His people must pursue those purposes with humility and faithfulness.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“Dead Poets Society” – the story of a controversial English teacher, John Keating, who shakes up a New England prep school for boys in the 1950’s. One day, Keating presses his students to “feel” the poetry and reads from Walt Whitman (**READ quote**):

*“O me!...of the questions of these recurring;
Of the endless trains of the faithless – of cities filled with the foolish;
What good amid these, O me, O life?
Answer: That you are here – that life exists, and identity;
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.”*

Keating repeats, “That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse” – then pauses, looks at his students, and asks, “And what will your verse be?”

That, my friends, is the question of the hour, “*What will our verse be?*” This is the first in a series on the Vision Statement for our church – composed by our Vision Team, approved by the elders, and now set before you for your consideration. This is another major step for us. But it is one we take with hope in God’s care and direction.

SCRIPTURE READING: **Esther 4:1-17**

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Here’s the backdrop to what we just read. Haman, the king’s favorite advisor, had promised that if the Jews were handed over to him for annihilation, he would personally pay 10 talents into the king’s treasury. The king agreed to Haman’s demand and orders were sent to wipe out the Jews. Esther was the queen, and since she was a Jew, Mordecai knew she was uniquely positioned to influence the situation.

Her first response was not an outright refusal but she makes clear what he was asking carried certain risk. And so Mordecai presses (**READ Esther 4:13-14**). “*Don’t think yourself so isolated. This affects us all. And don’t think yourself without some responsibility here. Help is going to come. But if you don’t avail yourself there will be consequences for you to bear. Consider that this might be why you are where you are.*”

Funny thing about the book of Esther – God is never mentioned. He is behind the curtains, removed from the center stage. But certainly the major player. And Mordecai knows that. Think about it. Where else would “relief and deliverance” come from? Who else would mete out such consequences? And, more than anything else, who could bring the sort of meaning, significance, purpose, and orchestration he describes? And Mordecai’s assumption forms the basis for his exhortation. There are no accidents. So he urges Esther to examine her life, to consider what’s going on around her, to recognize that the LORD was behind it all, and to respond, to bow, to yield, to follow His leading.

And surely we are called to do the same – to recognize that God has purposefully ordained all aspects of our lives and to pursue those purposes with all humility and faithfulness. Let me break this down into two broad areas which I think will be helpful.

I. DISCERNING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHO WE ARE

First, in recognizing God’s hand upon us and in committing ourselves to pursue the purposes He then has for us, we are able to discern the significance of who we are. Whoever we are, whatever we’re like, however we’re wired, God is behind it.

A) *Asking the Question: Who?*

(**READ 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 18; Ephesians 4:7**) What are the implications here?

1. Who are we?

Who are we? Who are we as individuals and even as individual churches? Obviously much could be said here but this much is clear. We are unique, gifted, and valuable.

2. Who made us this way?

At a minimum, that is who we are. And who made us this way? Did you catch it? Christ did, through the Spirit. These are His gifts to us, extensions of His grace toward us.

B) *Asking the Question: Why?*

Such is the “who.” What of the “why?” (**READ Romans 12:3-8**).

1. What we can't know

Why has He made us the way He has? We can't know this exhaustively. For starters, it takes time to discover who we are. Nor can we really what He'll call us to or how He'll choose to work through us. In terms of “why,” there's much we can't know.

2. What we can know

But there's much we can. We know He has intentions and purpose. Paul's words imply not only that God has gifted us but that He expects us to explore the gifts. Which makes it a matter of faithfulness. And contentment too. Can we live with how He's made us?

Illustration:

(**READ Illustration Viewer 2**):

A story tells of a mother and son who lived in a forest. One day when they were out, a tornado surprised them. The mother clung to a tree and tried to hold her son. But the swirling winds carried him into the sky. He was gone. The woman began to weep and pray: “Please, O Lord, bring back my boy! He's all I have. I'd do anything not to lose him. If you'll bring him back, I'll serve you all my days.”

Suddenly the boy toppled from the sky, right at her feet—a bit mussed up, but safe and sound. His mother joyfully brushed him off. Then she stopped for a moment, looked to the sky, and said, “He had a hat, Lord.”

I don't know why I like that story. I think because it points to our easy dissatisfaction with the Lord's dealings with us. Can we rest content, be at peace with who we are?

Application:

To each of us He is calling us to listen to what we've read here, believe that He has purpose in making us as He has, and pursuing those purposes. To ask ourselves, “*What are my strengths – my gifts and abilities? What are the desires He's laid on my heart – the things that bring me joy? What are the needs I see around me – the burdens that resonate down deep within? And can I rest with that? Can I praise God for that?*”

The same things can be applied to a church. We used to joke back when we had even more OBGYN's here than we do now that God knew we would also have many expectant mothers. It makes me wonder now why we have so many psychologists. Who are we? How has He gifted us as a whole? What resources has God given to us? To keep in step with the Spirit, we must take these things seriously. He has arranged things here just as He intended them to be. Why? What might He have in mind? What is the significance of the diversity of callings, abilities, experiences, resources, stages of life, and backgrounds – both geographically and spiritually? What is God doing here?

This much we know. There are no accidents. God calls us to recognize that He has purposefully ordained all aspects of our lives and to pursue those purposes with all humility and faithfulness. And that includes things such as who has made us to be.

II. DISCERNING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHERE WE ARE

God is behind who we are. And God is behind where we are as well. He moves us. He not only moves and places things in hearts, He moves and places lives.

Illustration:

When I was in seminary, one of the jobs I held was in the “Student Services” office. And one of the functions of that office was to maintain the “placement list” – a listing of known ministry openings within the PCA and elsewhere. One of the things we would remind students in their senior year is that God is indeed “the God of placement.” Now that can be encouraging when you don’t know where you’re going. Indeed, comforting when you’re not sure you want to stay. For He is the God of placement.

Think of Adam thrust from the Garden, Noah sent off in the ark, Abraham’s journey to a land he did not know, Joseph carried off to Egypt, the nation of Israel herself in the middle of the empires of her day and then later exiled. He is the God of placement.

A) Asking the Question: Where?

That said, a reasonable question to ask is “Where has He placed us?”

1. Where are we?

Where are we? Every place is unique. Every setting is a reflection, in at least some poor manner, in the ways, wisdom, climate, and culture of the Creator of it all.

2. Who placed us here?

(**READ Acts 16:6-10**) Where are we? And who placed us here? You can imagine Paul having to keep that in mind. And the answer was clear. They had not simply moved. They had been moved, placed, by Christ, through the Spirit, as a gift, by His grace. His grace to the peoples to whom Paul was sent. And His grace to Paul as well.

B) Asking the Question: Why?

But why? We ask, “Why this place?” (**READ Psalm 62:11-12a; Romans 8:28**)

1. What we can’t know

Again, just as we can’t know exhaustively why He’s made us who we are, we cannot know exhaustively why He’s placed us where He has. Or what He’ll call us to while we’re here. Or how He’ll choose to work through us while we’re here. Or how He may refine us in the process. There are some things we just can’t know.

2. What we can

But there are some things we can. We can know He has intentions and that they are good. That He expects us to explore the places He has placed us. And that it’s a matter of faithfulness. Indeed, a matter of contentment as well. Can we live with how He’s made us? Can we live with where He’s placed us? After all, He is the God of placement.

Application:

That said, where then has He placed you? What about the neighborhood in which you live, the classmates you sit by, the coworkers you see through the week? What about your marriage, your children, your life at home? Where has He placed you? Do you see that He has purposes in mind for you – even there? And can you praise God for that?

In terms of life in the church, some of you have heard me say before at the occasion of folks joining the church that such times are evidence of the Lord’s work. And that there are things worth considering as our lives intersect. That there is something about that person this church needs. That there is something about this church that person needs. How can we know that? Because He does all things with purpose.

But let’s go beyond that for a moment. Why has He placed us together in this place? And what is this place? If we believe that God is the God of placement, here too,

to keep in step with the Spirit, we must take these things seriously. Where are we? We are in a 21st century western culture, a culture deeply given to narcissism – an obsession with self and a conviction it’s all about me. Narcissism and relativism – the throwing out of all the standards, the rules, the guidelines of the past. It’s all up for grabs. Surely that has to mean something in how we do ministry in this context. We’re in the South – “the Gateway to the New South” even. A place where there is a distant echo, a memory, an imprint from a time gone by of common moral principles and guidelines grounded in the Bible. But that echo, memory, and imprint is fading. And left in its wake is a desire for something deeper, something real, for authenticity and a connection one to another to answer the lonely aching inside. Things are not as they once were. What effect does that have on the way we live here, the way we engage our neighbors? Getting closer to home, we’re in Clarksville, Fort Campbell, Hopkinsville – a relatively diverse population marked with the blessing and curse of transience. This too is where we are. This is where God has placed us. And we need to ask, “*What does that mean for us?*”

This much we know. There are no accidents. God calls us to recognize that He has purposefully ordained all aspects of our lives and to pursue those purposes with all humility and faithfulness. And that includes things such as where He has placed us.

CONCLUSION:

Let me come back now to Esther’s dilemma. Mordecai threw down the gauntlet, with all tenderness and conviction, pressing her to recognize what the LORD was doing and her role within it all. And Esther listened (**READ Esther 4:15-16**). It was a bold step. A faithful step but not a blind “leap of faith.” It was true to what is – a God who loves His own, who is at work in all things, and who calls His own to live accordingly.

Well, what about us? What do we need to do? We believe that the LORD is leading us in the direction as described here in this Vision Statement – the fruit of many hours of prayer, study, reflection, and discussion. We believe that He is orchestrating both the “who we are” and the “where we are” with purpose and intent. We believe that such a vision will lend boldness to our ministry efforts. And we believe that that boldness will make a difference. It always has (**READ [Supernatural Living](#), p.138**):

In the early 1740’s a ship was sailing from England to Georgia. On board were twenty-six German Moravian missionaries – men, women, and children. During their journey across the Atlantic, as they were holding a worship service, a storm broke out. The English passengers screamed with panic. But these Christians looked up and calmly sang on. An English passenger later asked, “Were you not afraid?” “I thank God, no,” said one of the Christians. “But were not your women and children afraid?” “No; our women and children are not afraid to die.” That astonished Englishman was John Wesley. And those Christians, demonstrating the transforming power of the gospel in the middle of a storm, were instrumental in the conversion of one of history’s great evangelists.

Fearless people have a way of getting the world’s attention. People who – because of their confidence in both the reality and the goodness of the Lord’s purposes do not fear the truth, the cost of discipleship, repentance, change, and the future. And such people have a way of getting the world’s attention. And being used for God’s glory.

May it be so with us. May we be so bold as to say, to believe, and to act upon the reality that God is at work in, around, and through us. That He has, is, and will continue to orchestrate both the “who” and the “where” and that He blesses humble faithfulness of His people. And may that embolden us all the more to be used by Him in His world.

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