

Jesus says, “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” In our other readings, we heard about faith, specifically the faith of Abraham as he struck out into an unknown world, relying on the promises of God...

Have you ever wondered what Abraham and Sara’s family thought, when they were leaving home and going nowhere in particular? I’m sure they thought he was nuts! But he was determined. God was leading him and making promises. God had given Abraham a vision of the future.

In our reading from Genesis, God promises Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars... Abraham believed God, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness. This particular promise, about descendants was as close to impossible as it could possibly be.

Our second lesson, put it this way, “he was too old--- and Sara herself was barren” and yet, descendants were born.” In other word, in this hopeless situation, God intervened and accomplished the impossible.

The second lesson also talked about Abraham in terms of not experiencing the full consummation of what he was promised, the writer says “from a distance they saw and greeted the promises.” God had given Abraham a vision, and although he

didn't realize it in its entirety, he lived as though he would. You see it is this vision that is important...

Visions of the future give us energy and direction... Visions of the future transform hopelessness into hopefulness... Visions of the future pull hopes and dreams into reality... Visions of the future live on long after we are gone...

Quick story... I have a friend who passed away about five months ago. He was a song writer. He had some commercial success early in his career. But eventually his life changed and he got a regular job with a regular schedule and a regular paycheck. Life is always a series of different chapters...

After he retired, he rediscovered his passion for song writing. He developed a formula for writing songs, he developed a community of people around him to collaborate, he was recording songs and developing marketing plans to sell them to other artists and labels. In fact, he had just started a music production company.

And then he was diagnosed with cancer. For a couple of months before he passed away, I met with him and his business partner, Sunday afternoons. He sat us down and told us everything he could, about writing songs and the business of music.

He desperately wanted his song writing group to continue. He had spent so much time and effort developing the skills and the people around him, he wanted it to carry on, he wanted his vision to come to fruition.

He made me and the business partner promise to continue the work after he passed away. And we have... I've met with the song writing team a couple times and they are very talented. They are coming up with good songs. And they are committed to one another, and continuing the work...

I saw my friend's passion for his dream and his vision. He was at a point in his life where he knew he wasn't going to see the fruition of his work, but he was determined that it would not stop after he was gone.

And so, it is for us as Christians... We have a vision of the Kingdom, and a passion to bring it into reality. And though we might not ever see it come into fruition on earth, we pass on the vision and passion.

We are all like links in a chain. A chain that stretches out of our past and reaches towards the heavens, toward our future. Abraham is one of those links in our chain. Jesus is the biggest link in our chain. The apostle Paul is one of those links... Martin Luther is one of those links... At Cross of Christ and Cannon River, Dr Eric Norelius is a link in our chain.

We stand on the shoulders of so many others. We stand on the shoulders of all those who had a vision of the kingdom of God. And when you think about it, it's really a miracle isn't it?

So often in Seminary when I would read about church history I often felt in awe. The fact that the church has survived for two thousand years, based on the testimony of a handful of ordinary people like you and me-- the disciples-- it really is miraculous.

And the reason it has survived is because of the Holy Spirit, constantly renewing that vision of the kingdom, which is our foundation.

Some people wonder about the future of the church. Frankly, I don't... Oh it will change as it always has, but make no mistake the church is God's work and it will continue... The Church is God's kingdom on earth, a vision built on a solid foundation. And it's not a matter of if it comes, but always a matter of when.

God has given us a vision, and it's this vision of the future that motivates us to go out there and build the kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

In our gospel lesson, immediately after Jesus announces that it's God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom, Jesus tells a story of being watchful. In other words, look for signs of the kingdom. Be alert, pay attention, keep your eyes open... Because it's in the paying attention, that our hearts come to recognize God's presence, in our lives and the lives of others... It's how we recognize the kingdom...

This is the kind of faith of Abraham, it's striking out in action, not knowing where we are going or if our vision will ever be consummated, but we do so, grounded securely on a foundation in Jesus. And whatever God builds through us, it will be constructed in relationship with Him and one another.

Christianity is as much a project concerning our future here on earth, as it is concerning our future, here after in heaven. In other words, as we watch for the kingdom, we bring it into reality, here and now. So, what signs have we seen that indicate the kingdom of God is here, right now? And, what are we doing, here at Cannon River and Cross of Christ, to bring the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven?

Frankly, when you stop to think about it, we're doing a lot... Every single little act of loving God and loving our neighbor, brings the kingdom of God into reality. I'm always amazed and encouraged when I give witness to the church being the church.

Whether it's through a pot luck, where we share from our abundance... Whether it's in our fellowship, every moment of listening to one another, caring and supporting one another... Members connecting and including and encouraging... I got a little card the other day... I was deeply moved; it was meaningful—it's a sign of the Kingdom.

So many people like that, just being who they are. Being loving, kind, gracious and generous...

We have people all the time stopping by to check on things, taking turns with greeting or opening or reading or singing or teaching... Or fixing, or organizing... or pulling weeds... Or tending to our cemeteries, and buildings... Cleaning out the kitchen, setting up, taking down...

And both churches have members extensively involved with the larger community as well... Serving on community boards or the township, or associations, or youth organizations like 4h, or organizing big community events. Everything from feed my starving children to the Welch community picnic, to the blood mobile...

And we are generous! Both churches! Giving money to people in need, supporting our missionary, Karen Anderson, cooking community meals, I was so touched during VBS, when our little kids were putting coins in the noisy offering to support a young girl in Tanzania named Gabby...

All this stuff, and even so much more that happens under the radar... all this stuff is loving God and loving our neighbor. These are signs of the Kingdom... The good news is that God has been working in and through us, doing amazing things. It has been God's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom...

We are watchful... We are built on the foundation of Jesus... We live toward a vision...

So, what have you seen? What have you noticed that God is doing in our midst? What is your vision for the Kingdom of God?

Amen...