

The health of a congregation depends on its vision.

Vision - Is our vision weak so that we can only see what is immediately before us? Are we like a person setting out on a journey unable to see the destination, becoming detoured by every obstacle in the path? When I get lost I drive like that, guessing what to do next, never knowing whether a right turn or a left one will be of any help.

Or is our vision strong, can we see a great distance ahead? Then obstacles will not cause us to wander aimlessly. Moving around the obstacle we will get back on course, heading for the goal.

Vision.

The health of any congregation depends upon its vision.

What are we here for? What is our purpose? What is our mission? Are we here just to be here, so that there might be a church building with the name Lutheran attached to it?

Or is there work to be done, somewhere where we are heading?

Are we involved in something so important that it will require sacrifice of all of us? Or is our vision so short-sighted that all that will be needed is spare change and spare time?

Well, listen to this:

Jesus comes here and says to you: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. Jesus could ask anyone but he is asking you, all of you gathered here today. Jesus is commanding you: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

Now that is ^a ~~the kind of~~ vision that sees a long way. Disciples of all nations is ^{like} a mountain peak hundreds of miles away. That is where we are heading. But you take your next step right here, one foot in front of the next.

Disciples of all nations - Extending your hand in the peace of Jesus' name to the people who surround you now.

Disciples of all nations - Inviting the clerk who waits upon you in the store to join our community of Jesus here.

Disciples of all nations - building a house for habitat in Jesus name.

Disciples of all nations is the mountain Jesus has his eyes on. if you cannot see that far yet trust his vision.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

To make disciples we baptize into Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Father, Son and Holy Spirit claim the life, empower the life of the baptized.

To make disciples we teach: Teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

Disciples are those living under the discipline of their master. Can you see that far, do you have a vision of what it looks like to obey Jesus' teaching?

Does the vision include praying? Jesus taught to pray for our enemies. Does the vision include forgiving? Jesus taught forgiving seventy times seven. Does the vision include giving your time. Jesus taught if someone ^{loves} asks you to go a mile, go with him a second mile. your wealth. Jesus taught: Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

Our lives are to be lived under the ~~one~~ ^{one} who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. All lives God wants to be lived under ~~the~~ ^{the} Jesus who died for all and was raised to gather all God's children into God's kingdom.

The more I understand the vision Jesus has for us, the more I feel overwhelmed. But there are two things that Matthew tells us in this passage that give me hope.

First, before Jesus spoke of his vision of disciples of all nations we read that when the disciples saw Jesus they worshipped him. Before we are sent off for that distant mountain we worship. But there is more: The passage reads, they worshipped him but doubted. Most translations add the word "some" to that, "some doubted" but it really just says, they worshipped him but doubted. The disciples Jesus sent were no different from us. Along with worship there was doubt, doubt within the community, maybe even doubt in each of their hearts. Was it doubt of what they were seeing as Jesus appeared to them? Did they doubt Jesus' power and authority, their own worthiness, their own faith? Whatever the doubt no one of them was disqualified from being sent to make disciples.

Not one of us is disqualified. You are given Jesus' vision, Jesus' call. You are sent to make disciples.

and the second thing that gives me hope of all:
And then Jesus' final word: And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Jesus is with us as we journey. There is nowhere on that road to where he is leading us that he will not be.