

Sunday, October 16, 2011  
Orinda Community Church UCC  
A Sermon by the Rev. Frank Baldwin

***NECESSARY VISION***

***Proverbs 29:18; Acts 2:17-18***

**I.** If God Almighty were ever to post a “help wanted” notice on Craig’s List or some professional-networking website, it’s pretty clear that in the eyes of God a very highly valued quality in anyone’s spiritual resume would be a sense of transcendent vision. Even a brief glance at either the Old or New Testament shows the Holy One calling together and leading forward a community of faith by means of a compelling vision of their shared life, purpose and destiny. The God we read about in the Bible seems to be always on the lookout for people who are open to inspiration, hope, foresight, dreams, revelation, prophecy, sensitivity, anticipation, insight, leading, commitment and trust.

Jesus of Nazareth, is a source of light and vision who miraculously gives sight to the blind and opens the eyes (and minds) of his hearers. He calls those who would follow him to also “see” with the eyes of the heart, showing them how to recognize the beauty and truth, the grace and love of God. He invites us to enter into his own comprehensive vision of God’s reign and realm as it ever forms in our midst; he calls us to enter into that kingdom of Heaven by the pathway he shows us.

And “happy are they,” who embrace this transcendent and insightful vision; happy, because within the bounds of mortal limitation and humility they are able to actually share God’s own perception of things. As Jesus promises in his exquisite Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” [Matthew 5:8]

This godly vision that defines and energizes our faith should be uplifting and noble, compelling and wonderful. It could also be astonishing, idealistic, wistful and impractical. If it is a vision grand and worthy enough for the kingdom of Heaven, it is likely to prove challenging, discomfoting, hard to imagine and difficult to attain. It will require of us a faith and trust, a grace and wisdom, a hope and perseverance that we did not know we had within us. But if it is a true vision, and from God, it will draw us into itself with the irresistible power of love, and leave us dissatisfied with all lesser plans (just as those who have experienced “the real thing” will never be completely satisfied with the artificial and imitation).

The all-to-seldom-visited book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible reminds us that people “perish” without a vision. Individuals who lack a spiritual sense of direction can wind up aimless and adrift. A community of faith, even a whole nation can fall apart without a common grasp of what holds it together and calls it forward into the future. The ancient biblical word translated “perish” in the King James Version is amazingly multi-dimensional in the original Hebrew, and the different translators have struggled for centuries to express just how awful it is to lack a sense of vision: the New Revised Standard Version says “the people cast off all restraint,” the New Jerusalem Bible has it “the people get out of hand,” New American Version: “they become demoralized,” The Living Bible: “they run wild,” Today’s English Version: “they become a nation without

order,” The Message: “they stumble all over themselves.” Being without a spiritual vision can be dangerous.

**II.** Last Sunday, the Orinda Community Church took an important step toward addressing this situation, affirming by unanimous vote an eloquent new statement of our vision as a congregation. This Vision Statement (a copy of which is on the back cover of your order of worship) emerged from a year of discernment meetings and listening sessions. It was composed from our collective hearts and minds; we hope – and we trust – that it bears witness to the inspiration of our God. It describes not only what we hold to be the best qualities of our church today, but even more significantly, it expresses what we believe God is calling us to be tomorrow:

*We aspire to a Christian faith that is authentic, adventurous and inclusive of all.*

*We envision a path of spiritual formation illuminated by faith, knowledge and practice.*

*We are called in these difficult and uncertain times to be people of peace and dauntless hope, relying on the spirit of Jesus in our midst.*

*We seek connection with others who are looking for a spiritual home. We reach out to doubters, explorers and people in crisis, respecting those of other faiths or no faith.*

*We are committed to love.*

Bold and evocative word articulating a compelling and transformative vision for our church. And now the next stage of our re-envisioning journey will be to begin prayerfully imagining together how the Orinda Community Church as it is, might come to more closely resemble the Orinda Community Church of God’s desiring.

**III.** Apparently, I have always been rather seriously nearsighted. I got my first glasses at the age of four or five, and it was a revelation to me, what the world really looked like. You see, it had never occurred to me before that, seen from a distance, trees have leaves, cities have individual buildings, faces have distinguishable features, and there are thousands of stars in the night sky. My parents suspected that something was wrong and began running little trick questions by me: Pointing at an open sky they would say, “Oh Frank, see the pretty bird up on that telephone wire?” “Yes!” I would always answer. Of course, there was no bird, and no telephone wire either, but in my nearsighted world I had no idea what I was supposed to be seeing. Until I got those first glasses, it never occurred to me that blurry vision was not all there is, that clarity of sight was even possible.

As we live with and into our new congregational Vision Statement in the months and years ahead, the questions we should be asking ourselves might be:

*Does our spiritual vision reach far enough?*

*Are we seeing things as clearly as we should?*

*Do we recognize what the Spirit is really showing us, or only what we desire to see?*

*Are we as open as we need to be to being challenged and changed by the vision we have been given?*

*Is our vision true to Christ's calling of us?*

*Is it worthy of the reign and realm of God?*

In the biblical address from that served as the introductory text to this sermon, the Apostle Peter (quoting from the Old Testament Prophet Joel) reminds us that we are a people of spiritual vision. We are called to “see visions,” we are destined to “dream dreams.” [Acts 2:17] A community seeing with the eyes of the heart, and acting together in faith and love is exactly what we are supposed to be. If we are open to see it, God will supply the necessary vision.