



Series: FOUNDATIONS:
Standing Firm – Moving Forward
Sermon: “Where Do We Go From Here?”
Dr. Jeffrey E. Greenway
Scripture: Acts 1:1-11; Matthew 28:16-20
July 8, 2007

‘Standing firm’ means that everything we do is going to be deeply rooted in Scripture – drawn out of our United Methodist tradition, distinctively Wesleyan in the way we approach the living of our faith, and founded on our mission. The mission of our church is to develop fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

‘Moving forward’ means we are standing in the great tradition of the people of God. God always calls his people to grow. God helps us to recognize that He is not done with us. It means stretching into our community and into our world. I dream that someday we will have a staff and people in this church that are reflective of the community of which we are a part. Do you want to know what that community looks like? Go to Wal-Mart and take a look at the people that you see – then take a look around here. Do they match? No, they do not. We want to orient the life of our church so that we are reaching out – stretching forward – so that we begin to recognize and identify ourselves so much with the community that the community becomes a part of who we are. Stretching forward means that we are going to be driven by our vision. The Board of our church has adopted our vision statement – to glorify God, grow disciples and change the world.

We are rooted in our mission and driven by our vision. Do you know what I have learned? Some of us have a hard time with vision. From the time we are very young, vision literally gets beaten out of us. If we are people that think outside the box, we are told to think back inside the box again. If we are people who color outside the lines, we are told to color back inside the lines again. What I want us to get in touch with again is what it means to be a person of vision. What is your life vision? What do you dream about doing with your life?

I learned early on that, if our children were going to have dreams and visions, it was going to be incumbent upon my wife, Beth and I to help build those into them. Everyone around them was trying to squash it out of them. I learned that if I did not expect much out of our kids, I did not get much; however, if I expected great things, they would do everything in their power to attain great things. I learned the role of a parent is to plant vision into the lives of their children and then to love and support them as they strive after them. Will our children attain all of the visions that are planted in their hearts? No, but if they know that they are unconditionally loved and they know that they are unconditionally cared for, they will risk doing great things with their lives. They know there are people around them who will love and care for them.

What is your life’s vision? What do you dream about doing with your life? It is really important to have something that is bigger than you are already. I recently read a story about four guys who were in an Emmaus share group in Memphis, Tennessee about twenty years ago. They decided that they were going to pray for and support one another as they pursued the individual vision that they sensed God had laid upon each of their lives. They wanted to glorify God with all that they had, so they had dreams about what they might become. One was an entrepreneur type of guy. He told these men twenty years ago that someday within five years he wanted to

be a millionaire so he would be able to prosper the Kingdom of God with what he had. The second guy was an on-the-road good sales person, but decided that was not the kind of life that he wanted to live. His vision was that someday he would be able to own the company for whom he was selling. The third guy was an educator; his vision was that someday he would be a professor at one of the great educational institutions in our country. The fourth guy was a bookkeeper; his dream was he would remain a bookkeeper.

Thirty-six months later, the entrepreneur was a millionaire, and he has been watering people with kingdom money ever since. Thirty-two months later, the salesman cashed in his stock options and bought the company for whom he was working. Twenty-eight months later, the professor received a tenured track position at the most prestigious university in America. Now twenty years later, the bookkeeper is still a bookkeeper. That is a noble profession – but he received exactly what he dreamed about. What do you dream about? What is the vision that you have for your life? I want to challenge you to begin to pray and dream about God's vision for your life – how God might use your life, combined with the lives of other people, to have maximum impact for Him in the world. I promise you this – if you can dream it, God can top it.

In the 1950s, there was a boy named Jimmy who was sitting down at his family dinner table. After the dinner was over, Jimmy went into the dining room to do his homework, Dad went into the living room to read the newspaper, and Mom went into the kitchen to wash the dishes. One hour later after the homework was done, the dining room light was off, and the mother thought that was odd. She walked into the dining room to see that her son, Jimmy, was sitting there looking at the moonbeam coming in from the outside. She said, "Jimmy, it is time to go to bed." Unlike any other night, he did not argue with her this time and ran right upstairs. One hour later, when she checked in on him, he was sitting on the windowsill looking outside – transfixed on the moonscape. The sun had set, and a full moon had risen as the outside had come to life. When his mother told him it was time to go to bed, Jimmy said, "I know, Mom," and he continued to look out at the moon. His mom said, "What are you doing?" He replied, "I am looking at the moon." She told him once more that it was time to go to bed, and he looked at her and said, "Mom, someday I am going to walk on the moon!" Who would have known that – on that night and in that bedroom – God planted a vision in the heart of Jim Irwin. Thirty-two years later, he became one of the twelve people in the human race to walk on the moon.

What is the God-sized vision that He has planted in your heart? What is the God-sized dream that He wants you to live with your life? Today, I want to talk about what happens when individual people of vision band together to pursue God's vision. When we do that, it is life-altering and world-changing.

Bob Logan has defined vision this way: "Vision is the capacity to create a compelling picture of a desired state of affairs that inspires people to respond. A Godly vision is right for the times, right for the church and right for the people. A Godly vision promotes faith rather than fear. A Godly vision motivates people to action. A Godly vision glorifies God and not people." What is God's vision for the church? That is what the passage in Acts chapter one is all about. The followers of Jesus had been through quite a journey. They had been called from obscurity to follow Jesus three years earlier. They had left everything to follow Him. They had walked with Him, talked with Him, ate with Him and prayed with Him. They had seen it all – the preaching, teaching and the miracles. In less than forty days before this passage, Jesus had died and they had scattered. When they learned that he had risen from the dead, for the next forty days they had been taught and instructed for living by

the risen and living Jesus. During that time, He had reassured them of their hope and encouraged them. He taught them what God would have them to be and have them to do.

In Matthew 28:17, after all of these things have happened, Jesus assembles his followers for one last time – and some of them doubted; if they could have seen it all, and they doubted, there is hope for us. Some of them doubted; yet, in the midst of that doubt Jesus, spoke His mission to them – they were going to go into all the world and make disciples of all people groups – baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – teaching them to obey everything that He had commanded them.

In Acts chapter one, Jesus cast His vision. He said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem (home town), in Judea (home region), in Samaria (place where their enemies lived) and to the outermost parts of the earth.” Here they are – uneducated, unsophisticated, common, ordinary and poor people – from the back-water country towns near the sea of Galilee. They had no wealth, no visible means of support, no military power, no external evidence that they could possibly fulfill this vision; in fact, if a search firm had been put together to put this team in place to fulfill this vision, these people would not have even had an interview. Their resumes would have been looked at and thrown into the round file next to the desk. These are not capable people – James and John were selfish and were always arguing about who was more important than the other; Simon Peter was hot and cold up and down – he put his finger in the air to see which way the wind was blowing when it came to fulfilling the mission that was before him; Thomas was a skeptic’s skeptic – he was continually questioning Jesus and always needed reassurance about what was good and true and right; the others ran for the hills as soon as trouble came. They were a very unlikely group of people. This is not your typical ‘Kingdom of God dream team’ – at least not at that moment.

God usually does not call people to a vision that they can accomplish in their own might. God calls us to do things that can only be done when we are totally dependent on His power and capacity to do what He calls us to do. God rarely calls the qualified – but He always qualifies the called. The key to the fulfillment of this vision is captured in the next ten days – they prayed. The job was too big – they prayed. The obstacles were too great – they prayed. The vision was impossible for them to accomplish on their own – they prayed. Their faith needed strengthened – they prayed. Ten days later, they received power – the gift of the Holy Spirit. God’s favor began to rest upon them.

During the next thirty years, God empowered them to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the Earth as they knew it – which was the Roman Empire. By the time we reach the end of the book of Acts in the 28th chapter, thirty years have passed; and historians tell us that the Gospel of Jesus Christ had spread to the end of the Roman World. There is historical evidence of Christians in southern England, in Spain, in northern and western Africa, in southern India, in southern Russia and everywhere in between. God’s power comes to us by the presence of the Holy Spirit sought out in prayer. Prayer is the key to do something for God that we could never do on our own.

A couple of weeks ago I shared a story of how – during Vacation Bible School here at the church – there were three to four hundred people in the worship center. Tracy Holstein and Matt Holley were doing a skit; and at the end of that skit, in the simplest language, Tracy talked about the need to have Jesus in your heart. She

gave an open invitation; and as I started to cry, a hundred children came forward to accept Jesus. That did not happen because Tracy and Matt are so talented – they are. It happened because of six to eight people who were sitting in the back of the worship center. The entire time that morning as the skit was going on, they had their hands extended up to heaven and their eyes were closed. They were praying with tears that God would move in the hearts of the children. The reason the people came to Jesus that day was because of the prayers of righteous people. The reason those children accepted Jesus that morning was not because of any human skill, intellect, or power; but the reason they came to Jesus was because of the movement of the Holy Spirit in their lives. When we pray, things begin to happen. When Jesus cast that vision for His followers, there is no way they could have done it themselves. There is no way they could have possibly known what was going to happen. They must have been overwhelmed by a God-sized vision, and it drove them to pray.

George Barna said, "Vision is the ability to understand the history, the present condition, and the potential of the church, and to conceive a plan of action that will maximize ministry potential. Vision always entails progress. It is never satisfied with the status quo." Vision is always calling us beyond ourselves with total reliance upon the capacity of God to empower and fulfill His vision. As we act in faith, God grants favor as vision is in the heart of His will. What do you believe God's vision is for our church? Our vision statement is to glorify God, grow disciples and to change the world. This vision is too big for us to do by ourselves and too big for us to do collectively. If you are scared today, that means you understand that we cannot do this with our own strength and in our own might. We can only do this on our knees and in total dependence on God. I want to remind you that is not the first time that happened here.

I would like the members to stand who were part of the Main Street church. In 1962, a pastor arrived in this community who recognized that the church did not have the capability of resourcing the hundreds of people who were moving into Reynoldsburg every month. That pastor began to cast a vision to these people who courageously took steps of faith to pursue the vision. In fact, Merv Skiles said the kind of commitment that they made was the equivalent of approximately \$1,600 in today's dollars. In 1964, they took a step of faith and moved off of Main Street out to ten acres in the middle of the country on Graham Road. They took an act of faith because they recognized that what they had was not enough for God.

Now I would like the people who were part of the vision of Kirsch Hall to stand. Following that addition, God continued to bless this church; and then in 1969, the colonial sanctuary was built. If you were part of building this colonial sanctuary, please stand. It was those folks who sacrificed to make it possible for us to be here – but then again, that was not enough. In 1995, Ralph Bauserman began to cast the vision that we were out of space and for us to do what God called us to do – we needed to do something more. In 1997, the worship center was dedicated with Doug Shriner as the pastor. If you were a part of building the worship center, would you also stand? For those of you who are seated, I want you to look at these folks with thanksgiving, because it is likely you would not have been here if they were not people of God-sized vision. They understood that they were not here to settle for the status quo. God had called them to be more. On behalf of all of us, I want to thank you for having courage and faith on your knees and for taking steps of faith that boldly moved us into the future to make a space for all of us. Would you join me in thanking these folks for their vision?

Being a people of vision is part of our DNA. We can be a people of vision because we are brought to this place thanks to the generations of people before us who had

vision that enabled us to come and be in this place what we have come to be in this day. God is not done with us. There are three big dreams that God has laid on my heart for this church. The first big dream is that I believe we are going to be a center of community transformation for Reynoldsburg and this region. I foresee the day when this will be the place where hurting people come to have their needs met. We are already well on the way of doing that with ministries like The Shepherd's Place, Community Cornerstone, Home Again, the local food pantry and the local work teams. I see something that is more expansive than that. A friend of mine's church caught a vision for transforming their community. Their church was in the middle of the city that had the highest per capita of homeless families of America. They bought an apartment building, and the church decided that they were going to take one family every three months and move them from homelessness into independent living. They took a new family in, they tutored the children, secured jobs for the parents, and helped the families with health care and money management. They gave the families everything the first month; however, by the twelfth month, they were paying 100% of the way themselves and were ready to move off into another apartment so that they could be living independently as full and responsible members of the kingdom. That is community transformation.

What would it look like if our church became serious about community transformation? What would it look like for the persons who were paroled from prison who have no place to go? What would it look like for the persons in Reynoldsburg who are homeless? What would it look like for broken and hurting people to be able to know that they would be able to come to this place and we would love them like Jesus – to resource them the way Jesus would – and help them to get on their feet again.

The second big dream I have is that we will have multiple communities of faith affiliated with this congregation. We currently have multiple communities of faith that meet at 5:30 Saturday, 8:00 Sunday, 9:15 etc. – it is just that they do not meet in different buildings. What I am talking about is sometime in the next twelve to eighteen months, calling forth 300 of our people who feel the call of God to reach a different people group – to bless them and along with some of our pastoral leadership to go and begin to hold a worship service on the weekend at some other site. Reynoldsburg Church will still be the mission-in-training site. We are not going to build something else right now; instead, we are going to rent a school or convention hall. When we send these 300 people, at the same time we will invite 30,000 of our un-churched neighbors to come and join them. Statistics tell us that 300 will show up the first week; so, if we do this right, we will have 600 people – 300 of whom have no meaningful relationship with Christ in the church – and we hope we can draw them close to God. I do not see us doing that only once, I see us doing that every three or four years as we become very intentional about reaching out into the community and the region around us for the cause of Christ.

My third big dream is that we will be all about global impact. There is a growing heart for mission in the life of this church – a growing heart to recognize that the strategy of Jesus was Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the Earth. The strategy for Jesus today is Reynoldsburg; Pickerington; Columbus, Ohio; United States to the ends of the Earth. I would like us to think about and dream about together on our knees, what God might call us to be on global impact.

I have a friend who has a church that adopted an entire tribal group in Sudan. Do you know that church has singularly rescued an entire tribal group from the genocide that has been taking place in Sudan? They are feeding them, clothing them, housing them, educating them and helping them to be adopted and grafted

into the kingdom of God. I have another friend who is helping raise up indigenous leaders in other cultures. His church has decided – for \$100,000 per year per school – they can support a seminary in a third-world, developing country. They are pouring money into these seminaries to help pay for education of hundreds and thousands of indigenous leaders so that they can go where you and I can never go. I have another friend who adopted an HIV-positive girl from a Romanian orphanage. When he was there, God broke his heart; so he returned with a group of people from his church, and God broke their heart. Now that church has built three orphanages in Romania in which they are taking children that nobody else wants and loving them into the arms of Jesus. These are not the only dreams that I have. I know that you have bigger dreams than me – if you will just dare to dream. If you will just dare to vision, imagine what God will do. If we can dream it, God will top it. How do we move into that kind of vision? I think we learned from the first-century church. I think we have learned from the generations of Reynoldsburg Church that came before us. The only way we can do this is to pray. Are you ready to get started?