

“Write the Vision LARGE!”<sup>1</sup>  
Habakkuk 2:1-3 (God tells the prophet to write the vision LARGE.)

Preached by Carolyn Bohler  
October 23, 2011  
Redlands First United Methodist Church

After the scripture is read, **I’ll stand to the corner of the top platform with a small sign**, the size of a sheet of paper, with these words: "We're ONE Body, with MANY MINISTRIES, between Olive Ave & Vine St . . . & beyond . . ."

John, Karen, and Dennis: Enter from back of sanctuary on Olive Ave side, “jogging” sort of, to the front and going to the right in front of everyone.

Karen: Did we pass a sign?

John: I saw one, did you?

Dennis: But I could not read it, do you know what it said?

I’ll **put down the small sign and move more to the piano side, hold up a poster**, with the same words on it. You three joggers would be by the piano after your words above, so you turn to run back toward Olive Ave side, in front still, and as you pass me.

John: There's another sign, I think it said something about ministries, maybe many of something...

Karen: I saw something about One Body... and Beyond...

Dennis: I didn't get a good enough look at it. I wonder how important it was.

THEN **the same image appears on the screen**, which has been raised for the Scripture reading, but has gone to black. All three of you, turn around, see the sign, **stand still and look up**:

John: Wow, that's quite a vision!

Dennis (very loudly, boldly, facing all people): We’re One Body, with Many Ministries--  
Between Olive & Vine . . . & Beyond . . .

Karen: I sure want to follow **that vision!**

Then the three jog along the north wall to back...

Carolyn stands up to preach:

Thanks for being jogging partners. [To congregation]

How many of you have ever heard of the Prophet Habakkuk? Did you know there’s a whole book in the Bible named *Habakkuk*?<sup>2</sup>

In one important way, Habakkuk was like a famous prophet before him, Isaiah, and another prophet whom Habakkuk might have known, because they were living at the

same time—Jeremiah. This is what they had in common: they all called attention to injustice in politics, in the judicial system, and in economic institutions.

I am sad as I read about Habakkuk's vision. My sadness is because the prophet Habakkuk could say much the same thing today. Around the world, we certainly do not have justice for all—in courtrooms, in business, or in governments.

This week, yet again, we heard the phrase “bring to justice,” which has come to mean, “punish.” When people do bad things, we hear that they need to be “brought to justice.” I'm struck that we hear the word “Justice” or “Justice for all, around the world,” mentioned, it seems, less often or with less intensity. Justice, equity, dignity for all is a positive, something that should be... that's what the line of Judeo-Christian prophets spoke for, not just making sure that people who did horrible things were punished.

The passage we are focusing upon is the shortest speech in the book of Habakkuk. I do not know Hebrew, but I have learned that this tiny passage is difficult to translate into English because it can mean a variety of different things. One thing is clear: God is telling Habakkuk to write down his vision on tablets so that it is clearly visible.<sup>3</sup>

Okay, so Habakkuk is writing down his vision. This is where there are different possibilities according to the various translations about what is meant in Hebrew.

Karen, John, and Dennis acted out one option. God tells Habakkuk to write his vision large, so that runners, running by, can see the vision. It's nice to know that some things stay the same. We don't write on tablets today, but we do still have runners. The *Believe Walk* two Sundays ago followed a path which was filled with store-windows with pink ribbons and all sorts of pink images...urging people onward, not only on the walk, but also with hope. The larger the words, the more likely the Believe walkers could read those store window messages.

There's another option, though, for what may have been meant. Let me demonstrate.

**[Pick up bulletin for the day and start jogging, while reading it.]** I'm jogging, but I don't want to waste any time, so I'm reading, too. Golly, it's hard to read while I'm bumping up and down...It would be easier if the print were larger.... **[Pick up large print edition of bulletin]** Ah, this larger print bulletin is so much easier to read while jogging!

Do you get the point? The scripture passage is translated, “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, *so that a runner may read it.*” It could be that the runner is holding the tablet, while running, and reading it, while running. ...the New International Version reads: “so that a herald may run with it”.....the New Revised Standard Version: “so that a runner may read it”.....

Some of you place reading material, magazines or books, on elliptical or treadmill machines so that you can read while you “run” at the gym. I imagine those of you who do read while you run consider the size of the print when you choose what to take to the gym.

There's still a third option. It's possible that this passage means that the vision should be written so plainly that a person “reading quickly”...that is, *running* through the text....can read it...Today we might say we can speed read something better if the text is big enough.

Biblical commentators point out even a fourth option....It could mean that there's not a lot of time before there are going to be awful consequences due to the lack of justice for all, so they need to “run” to establish justice.

Whatever was intended...

God tells Habakkuk to MAKE THE VISION CLEAR, PLAIN, LARGE...SO THAT PEOPLE CAN READ IT.

Those of you who have worshipped very often in African American congregations are probably familiar with a common response to the preacher, when the congregants feel that the preacher is speaking very clearly and meaningfully—They say, “Make it Plain.” *It’s a compliment.* It means, “*You are making it plain.*” Do you want to practice saying that just in case Karen or I are especially clear and meaningful? (Make it plain.)

We know that God told Habakkuk to make his vision clear, large, plain. But what was God’s vision? I think we can sum up his vision of Justice with a vision we pray every Sunday: “**THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH.**” Habakkuk wanted justice, and God’s will, on earth, is surely justice, isn’t it?

We might find ourselves praying the Lord’s Prayer on some Sundays with a little tiny font sized print in our mind. Or, we may pray with such intensity and purpose and *expectation* that we make our vision very clear . . . like we did today—**THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH!**<sup>4</sup> That’s our vision; we are clear about it; we pray it; we do our best to live it!

Talking about running makes me think of a cop and a kid. The cop stopped a kid for speeding, then got out of his car and went over to the kid’s car. The kid rolled down his window and the cop said, “I’ve been waiting for you all day.” The kid replied, “Yeah, well I got here as fast as I could.”

“**THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH**” makes sense as Habakkuk’s vision and as Jesus’ vision—*it’s the big vision, the world vision*—and it’s extremely important.

Yet, we hold and live out visions on different levels at the same time.

Realizing that our address is “ONE,” we on the Stewardship Committee found ourselves marveling that **our very address names our Vision: to be the ONE BODY of Christ, through Many Ministries... between Olive and Vine.. and Beyond.**

1) The big vision shared by Jesus in the Lord’s Prayer and Habakkuk way earlier is “Thy Will be Done on Earth.” –especially clear when there is justice for all 2) we can name our current congregational vision, to be and to live out as fully as possible, the One Body of Christ through Many Ministries...on our block and beyond. 3) There another level of visioning, too. We can focus on our personal visions.

Some of us are filling out applications for colleges...we have visions of what we might do in the world to be helpful, creative, and fulfilled. Others of us are raising children who are filling out applications; we strive to guide them, even as we strive to fulfill our own callings. All of us are deeply rooted with personal histories, personal futures, filled with visions of what can be. Some of us are looking back at 8 decades of life, affirming our visions, yet we are still aware that there’s a lot more to do and be.

“Write the Vision Large”—has been on my mind recently, so I notice a song I might not have paid any attention to otherwise. It’s sort of a country song, I think, and I don’t listen to country music--it was a strange occurrence that led me to hear this song... I think I was changing stations on the radio when it caught my ears.

The title is “I Wanna Live in a Billboard.” Here are a few of the lyrics:

I wanna live in a billboard

I wanna be in that happy place

I wanna live in a billboard  
I'd be a cowboy with a leather face  
I wanna live in a billboard  
Where life is safe and so conventional  
And all my friends are one dimensional  
Shallow but larger than life

I checked this out on the internet and learned that this song was written a few days after "9-11." The singer was driving through Nashville listening to the horrible news and stunned by the contrast he saw on the simplistic billboards high above the road....

Carolyn, you might be thinking, what does this song have to do with what you've been talking about? Well, Habakkuk's vision of justice for all, written large, is probably the only "Billboard" in the Bible. It's a complex vision of hope.

You notice a blank page in your bulletin, with the title, "My Vision." I'm recommending that each of us creates a petite personal billboard right now. We are invited to write our personal visions large. Take up the whole space... Your vision is something you yearn to experience or to be.

I'm thinking of a couple examples:

- "To have wholeness in my body as well as my mind."
- "To develop mutuality in relationships."
- "To enjoy life as well as to live it."
- "To speak up when I have something to say." ("To listen to others more.")
- "To connect with others who are searching."
- "To put myself where my values are in relation to politics."
- "To intentionally ask my faith questions."

It could be that we have been living our personal visions almost as footnotes, as tiny little notations at the end of our days, when we have no more energy left. That might be enough some months, even some years in our lives. But sometimes we may become like Prophet Habakkuk and experience God telling us to WRITE OUR VISION LARGE FOR ALL TO SEE. That is, God may be saying, Prophet Gary or Prophet Dick or Prophet Linda, MAKE YOUR VISION PLAIN—so anyone passing by you can see it.

People who have written their personal visions large are awesome to be around. I started to name some of you, and then realized my list was getting up to fifty, so I better not name any names. It's just that when we are around people who have written their personal visions large it is so compelling that they affect even those who run by them.

In preparing this sermon, I got to wondering, "Would people be surprised where I stand on things that matter a lot to me?" In other words, even with a pulpit, "Do I write my vision large enough?" Have I been living my vision as a footnote when I should be writing my vision as big as a **billboard**? How about you? Do you write your vision big enough so that those of us passing by you will notice it?

A psychologist I like a lot named Rollo May explained in one of his books that we move from WISH to WILL to DECISION. When we *wish* for something, we're playfully entertaining the idea in our mind. When we *will* that something, we are mobilizing our resources. When we *decide*, we are on our way.

I think God was telling Habakkuk not just to *wish* for justice, but to help people to *will* it and *decide* for it. We in this congregation with the address "ONE" have not only

*wished* to be One Body, with Many Ministries between Olive Avenue and Vine Street and Beyond... ; we have collectively *willed* and *decided* to be that One Body of Christ with Many Ministries. That same wishing-willing-deciding process makes sense for each of us, as we follow our personal visions.

I'm very sure that God would be happy if we, too, made our own personal visions clear, so that even those who are in a hurry when they are around us would catch our message!

---

<sup>1</sup> The Lord gave me this answer: "Write down clearly on tablets what I reveal to you, so that it can be read at a glance.  
good news

Then the Lord answered me and said: "Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it king  
James

Then the LORD answered me and said, "Record the vision And inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run  
new American standard

<sup>2</sup> Actually, the apostle Paul in the New Testament quotes one tiny phrase from this prophet—"The just shall live by faith. Some of you know that there's a thing called a "lectionary," a set of biblical texts that many pastors use to preach from, over a 3-year period. I'm a rebellious pastor who wants to preach from many parts of the Bible that aren't included in that Lectionary. Only that little phrase quoted by Paul is in the Lectionary, but I truly love and find deep spiritual guidance in the passage we are writing large today.

<sup>3</sup> If a prophet wrote down their vision, then later, after events happen, people could go back and check to see how those events turned out in comparison with the prophet's vision.

<sup>4</sup>