



BelPres Church

Vision Sunday

Speaker: Scott Dudley

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Thank you for being here, those of you who are here in the room. Thank you to those of you who are joining us online. Great to have you here.

I want to start with two questions. First, how many of you, when you see the news and all the problems in our world and in our country, how many of you are at least mildly concerned? And all the way to really like super concerned, right?

Okay, second question. What do you think Jesus wants us to do about that? You know, sometimes you hear people use the phrase WWJD, what would Jesus do? In this moment in history, my question is more WWJWHCTD. What would Jesus want his church to do? And I'm pretty sure the answer is not cower in fear. Okay, just going out on a limb on that one. I also think the answer is not just be really angry and complain and post a lot about it and just kind of rage against the machine. Pretty sure that's not the answer either.

Jesus calls us to courageously heal those problems that we see in his name and through his power. So let me read to you from what's called the Presbyterian Book of Order. And doesn't that sound like a hootenanny? Right? Not the Book of Joy, not the Book of Gladness, the Book of Order, which is all the rules. But it has some great theology in the beginning. Like it trails off after that. The author seems to have lost the narrative thread, but it starts strong. And it says this.

The church is called to be a sign of the new reality made available in Jesus. That sins are forgiven. The dividing walls of hostility are torn down. The needs of the poor and the oppressed are met. It goes on to say the church is the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all humanity.

In other words, what that means is when folks look at us, BelPres, when they hear how we talk, when they see how we behave, when they see what we're about, they're supposed to draw the conclusion, oh, so that's what God intends for all humanity. Those BelPresers showed us what that is.

Then it says the church is called to undertake this mission, even at the risk of losing its life, trusting in God alone as the author and giver of life. Oh my goodness. When I first read those words as a college student, which, by the way, is about the nerdiest sentence you're ever gonna hear, right? Like in college, my friends are going out, they're having fun, I'm reading the Presbyterian Book of Order. So much weirdness packed into one little person.

But when I first read those words, I said, yes, Jesus, that, that's what I want my life to be about, proclaiming you and your good news and your forgiveness that shatters guilt and shame. You're tearing down the dividing walls of hostility, you're healing of injustice. And at the time, I had zero plans to be a pastor, mostly because the idea made me sick. I plan to live this mission out as a college professor.

And when we live like this, so radically against the grain of every culture, so radically for Jesus, each other, and the world, we become free, bold, unafraid, because we're part of the solution, not the problem. And that just gives us hope, as the power of the Holy Spirit flows through us to make right what is wrong, repair what is ruined, mend what is broken, that, that Jesus, that's what I want my life to be about. I'm always gonna be all yours, all in.

We are in the Book of Order, God, applause in modern worship. That's amazing. We're in a sermon series about unleashing the good news of Jesus, which we do individually as we share our experience of how Jesus is good news with others. But we also do that corporately, together as a church.

And you've heard me say this before, I'm gonna keep saying it. God has not put so many people in this church with so many gifts and so many resources and so many skills and so many talents just for us to look good. Although you do look good. Like, I'll give you that. He hasn't done that just so that we can posture and pose. No, he's put all of this here to be part of his healing the world. That's both the responsibility of being a large church, like there's a responsibility to steward that well. It's also the joy. It's also we get to do together big things. And that's really cool. Jesus invites us into that.

So, if you have a Bible, turn to Acts chapter 1. Acts is in the New Testament, and it's after the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They tell the story

of Jesus, his death, and his resurrection. And the Book of Acts carries on the story. The Book of Acts is about how the early church spread Jesus' healing around the Roman world. It starts in Jerusalem. Book of Acts starts in Jerusalem, and then it ends in Rome. And it's written by Luke, who also wrote the Gospel of Luke.

So Acts chapter 1. In my former book, that's the Gospel of Luke, in my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven. Began to do? Like, didn't Jesus finish it? Like, didn't he finish the job? Like, if Jesus was just the start and he ascended into heaven, well, then who's gonna finish the story? That's a real question. Who's gonna finish the story?

You are. I am. We are. That's why Jesus left behind a church. The church's job is to finish the story. Not on our own power, but through the power of Jesus.

Verse three. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about how to get into heaven. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that too. But that wasn't his main message. His main message was the kingdom of God, which isn't so much about us going to heaven as it is about us, through his power, making it here on earth more like it is in heaven. That's our mission. That's our commission.

Skip to verse six. Then they gathered around him and asked, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel? Okay, as I said last week, their agenda is that Jesus would be a military leader who would defeat the Roman Empire and reestablish the kingdom of Israel back to its former glory. So they're like, okay, now that you've been raised from the dead in all Jesus, now it's time to kick out the Romans, right? And in the original Greek, the verb form that's used here denotes ongoing action. So a literal translation would be the disciples asked over and over, and they just kept asking over and over like a little kid on a trip. Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Is it kingdom time yet, Jesus? Is it kingdom time yet, Jesus?

Verse 7, he said to them, it is not for you to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority. Okay, Jesus maybe didn't use that tone of voice, but I would have used that tone of voice. Like, he just kind of brushes their question aside. Like, stop it. Stop it. Just listen to me. Stop with your little agenda. Just listen to me, okay?

You, and that you is plural. Y'all will receive power. What kind of power? Military power, political power, economic power, uh-uh, spiritual power, when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Or for us on the east side in King County, in Washington state, and all around the world.

And that is our mission, BelPres. And it's big and it's exciting. And when we're part of it, it brings courage, hope, and joy because in the face of so much going wrong, we get to be part of how Jesus is making it right.

Our theme all year has been how Jesus unleashes us from our fears, addictions, busyness, monotonous routines that hold us back. He unleashes us for a bigger life, unleashes us to participate with him in healing the world. And as part of that, in November, we presented you with our vision to unleash Jesus' good news together as a community through eight different projects.

And today is Vision Sunday, which we do twice a year to kind of just say where God is leading us as a church. And I'm not going to go through all of these projects. I will update you on some of them. But as we've said throughout this whole thing, this is not a capital campaign. It's not really even about those projects. It is, but it's also about something bigger. It's about us being unleashed, us being more like Jesus. God doesn't use us to get projects done. He uses projects to get us done. This helps get us done, helping us experience more of Jesus' power and presence. And part of that is becoming a radically generous community with our time, money, and influence.

And 40% of our regular attenders have signed commitment cards saying that they want to be part of this. Well done, and thank you. Like, well done and thank you, and that's a good, 40%, that's a good number. Many of you have heard of the 80-20 rule, where in any organization, including churches, 20% of the people do 80% of the giving and the serving. So for us to be double that, at 40%, that's awesome, after only four weeks of talking about these projects.

And radical generosity with time, money, and influence is so counterculture. So different than what the world thinks. We know it's going to take time for all of us to come on board. And we can give you more details about these projects in the family meeting at 1220 here in this room. There'll be food, games for kids, so I encourage you to come back.

But BelPres, it is clear. We are being unleashed. God is moving through us, and there's a lot to celebrate.

So in financial terms, we've been running significantly ahead of our budget for every month so far since fall. We've been running significantly ahead of our budget. Now, because of giving patterns and pledges that haven't come in yet, we don't know how far ahead we'll end with until the end of our fiscal year in August. But if current trends continue, that's an important if, because sometimes when we're running ahead of budget, people stop giving, and so current trends stop trending.

But if current trends continue, we're going to be able to move forward on some of the projects that require financial resources, such as the affordable child care, saving up for the expanded lobby, and saving up to purchase property for affordable housing for refugees. Did I mention we can do that if current trends continue?

But it's not just money. In the last two months, we've contacted over 200 people who indicated they want to give their time to help this effort go forward. And we've also had some people volunteer significant amounts of time, 15, 20, 25 hours a week or more, to help us project manage these projects, which was a huge prayer we had going into this, because if we had to hire that expertise, that would cost us a million dollars or more. These people are giving their time to help us do this.

So just a few updates. And again, we'll give more in the family meeting.

But for the Anchor in Flame project, which will train people to be spiritual mentors to other people who want to grow in their faith, because anyone who has grown in their experience of Jesus knows that key to that was a person, a coach, a mentor, we're going to begin training those people this fall. We'll have our first one roof gathering in May of all of our communities, African, Chinese, modern, sanctuary. We'll have a meal together to help us be more connected as a community. We'll go deeper into the Bible, and we'll grow in our experience of Jesus by learning from each other's cultures, because that expands who Jesus is in our minds, breaks him out of whatever culture we're from, and puts them into a much bigger perspective.

Under the category of our campus, we now have preliminary design concepts for what expanding the lobby into the courtyard, capturing that space might possibly look like. And there's some pictures in the lobby you can look at, you can see what it might look like. These are just preliminary. These are not the final version, not the final version. So don't be looking at them going, I don't know, I was thinking more mauve than taupe for the walls. Like, no, these are just kind of give you a concept of what that could look like, give the kind of

space it could create for joining together around meals together on Sundays. We don't have a space to do that.

We have learned from our African brothers and sisters, man, nothing builds community like food. So we would love to be able to on a Sunday—thank you, Pastor Alexis—we would love to be able on a Sunday to sit around tables together and share a meal together. Sundays when you're all here, that lobby, that expanded lobby would help us do that, be a huge boost for community.

For the Affordable Child Care Project, a person with a lot of expertise in this area has volunteered significant amounts of time to help us create a sustainable model for what that could look like, which is a big first step to providing affordable child care to low-income families who desperately need that just to survive financially.

For region and world projects, right now we're focusing on low-hanging fruit for affordable refugee housing, which is another big need in our area, as well as in our church in our East African community. By low-hanging fruit, we mean having refugees live in some of our own homes for a short time while they're waiting for a more permanent solution, but also houses that become available through some of you to house refugees more permanently.

We've also had 40 people come forward to be cultural companions for refugees, to help them learn English, learn how to navigate US culture, everything from how do you do a job interview here to how do you register your kids for school. So those are just a few updates. Again, more information in the meeting at 1220. But it's bigger than just these projects.

It's about us becoming more like Jesus, seeing his power move through us together to heal the world. And already we've got some really cool stories, like Susanna Calvary.

Susanna has a PhD in education, and she's been using that PhD in education, but also in the tech industry. And part of her PhD was on mentoring, which is something she hasn't been able to do in the jobs she's had. And she enjoyed her jobs. She and her husband enjoyed the comfort of being a dual-income family, but Susanna felt like something was missing.

And Susanna has been praying for a year and a half that Jesus would open a door for her to live more fully into what she's passionate about. And in September, she made the difficult decision to quit her job to give her time to discern what that might be.

Well, then in November, we announced these projects, and she felt God give her a strong call to give half her time to BelPres toward this vision. And at the time, she wasn't quite sure what that would mean. But as we talked with her, as she talked with our team, it became really so, so clear that she had all the skills that we were praying for to help project manage the Anchor and Flame Spiritual Mentoring Program—mentoring, which is what she got her PhD in.

So that's what she's doing now. And in her words, this is what she said. She said, we're only a few months in, but I can tell you that I know this is the right path. My heart feels so much more settled than it has in years. I'm seeing God move by providing creative energy for the project and how this work builds on relationships I've made over the years here at BelPres. She says, I'm way closer to God. I'm hearing his voice more. I'm seeing him work in ways I wouldn't have expected.

Jesus answered an 18-month-long prayer for Susanna to do something that she is passionate about and get to be part of changing lives. Because as I said, anyone who has grown in their experience of Jesus will tell you, key to that process was a mentor, a coach. Life on life changes lives. Susanna gets to be part of changing lives. And it's a sacrifice to go from two incomes to one, but it doesn't feel like a loss to them. She's loving it.

That's one story. Here's another.

A couple that's part of this church own a rental home, and they felt God lead them to offer their home at significantly reduced rent for refugee housing, which is one of our eight projects. That's radical generosity on the part of this couple.

So now two women in their 20s who are from Rwanda are going to live there. And both of these women have recently completed degrees. One of these women came to the US alone without family and has worked incredibly hard to build her life here, having to navigate a very expensive housing market, find stable work, and all of that.

And these two women are close friends, and this housing is going to give them a stable foundation to begin to build a life here in the United States. One of these women said, when I found out about the housing, I was feeling so much pressure lifted and I finally felt relief. It showed me that someone truly cares about us. To be seen and supported like this means a lot. I'm grateful, I feel cared for, I feel loved.

But this isn't just some transaction about housing. The couple who offered this house, they're entering these women's lives, they're becoming friends with these two women, helping them find jobs. It's a relationship that breaks cycles of trauma and poverty and launches refugees into a whole new life, and transforms the people who come alongside by being in relationship with people who, in some cases, have escaped unimaginable horrors.

And that breaks our hearts for what breaks God's heart, and it reorders our loves and reorders our priorities. It puts us more in the kingdom of God and less in the kingdom of me and mine, which makes our lives bigger, which makes our problems seem smaller by comparison.

Those are just two stories from the last two months. BelPres, God is doing things. God is moving, and it's exciting, and we're going to keep following him wherever he leads us to go.

So action steps. First, as we've said throughout this series, do this week's exercise in the journal, which you can find on our app or on our website. And this week is simple. Ask God to give you an opportunity to share your story of how Jesus has been good news to you.

And if you want an example of how to do that, I'd refer you to the story I told toward the end of the sermon last week about how I recently was able to do that with a young man in my gym. That might give you a little bit of a template for how to do that. That's how we unleash the good news of Jesus individually.

And then second, if you haven't done so already, become part of this unleashed vision, which is how we unleash Jesus' good news corporately together. And 40% of you have already done that. Thank you and well done. And 40% is a good number. You know what a better number is? 100%.

Commit to follow the biblical practice of tithing, which is to give 10% of your time, money, and influence to the faith community you're a part of to advance God's kingdom, or get as close to that 10% as you can. And if you're already tithing, consider going above and beyond.

And this is not something—we say this a lot—this is not something we want from you, it's something we want for you. Honestly. Honestly. I know pastors and money is a bit blah blah blah. No, honestly, really, there is so much freedom in this. There is so much life in this. I don't know anyone who tithes and regrets it.

This week, I was talking to someone who, he and his wife recently started tithing, and he was talking about how hard it was to do it. And I said, oh, I've always said, I don't know anyone who ties and regrets it. I might have to start saying now, I only know one person who regrets it. And he said, oh, no, no, no. No, no, we don't regret it. No, we're not going back. It's hard.

But what this is doing for our family, the ways that Jesus is providing for us in ways that we didn't see coming, it shows us that Jesus is real. We can rely on him, which is decreasing our worries about money, because we're watching him provide. And we get to be part of how Jesus is changing people's lives.

Plus, it puts boundaries around our lifestyle, without which our lifestyle would just keep growing and growing and growing, and there's no end to what we would want. And that does not bring happiness, that brings misery. Tithing puts boundaries around that. No, no, no, no, we don't regret it. No, no, no, no, we're not going back.

And in our hyper individualistic US culture, where we have forgotten how to work together for the common good, and it's killing us, when we unite our time, money, and influence, we get to be part of something so much bigger than we could ever do on our own.

So if you haven't committed, you can do that today. There are commitment cards in the lobby. You can do that on our website. Or if you're already doing this and you just didn't sign a card, please do that, because that helps us plan better, be better stewards of the money, plus something happens spiritually when we commit.

These projects will change thousands of lives, but it's going to take all of us. So don't be thinking, oh, they have enough, they don't need me. No, no, no. This is a big vision, because we are a big church, and we have a responsibility to have big vision, and it's going to take all of us.

And as we do this together, it unleashes us from our worries and idolatries to be part of God's bigger kingdom. And we're already a good church, but this takes it up another notch. If we're all doing this, this makes us an irresistibly attractive, earth-shaking, devil-breaking church.

When we provide affordable child care to help low-income families who need it to thrive, when refugees come here traumatized, dislocated, and we relationally help them heal, and they help the rest of us heal, and because we're in relationship with each other, we begin to tear down dividing walls of hostility

between races and between nationalities that's ripping our world to shreds right now.

As we become a radically generous church in a culture of me and mine, you walk into that church and you feel the difference because radically generous hearts are warm and full of joy. You walk into that church where folks aren't tied to money or don't have this idol of money or they're not afraid about having enough money because they're tithing and they're seeing God provide. You walk into that church and you go, wow, something is different here.

When significant numbers of us are in mentoring relationships, which always go both ways, mentor always gets as much or more as mentee, we become more connected intergenerationally. And when we're all growing in our experience of Jesus' power, that kind of church is on fire as the Holy Spirit's power is unleashed through us together.

You walk into that church and before you say hello to anyone, you go, whoa, something is going on here. Something is different here. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom, and freedom reigns in this place. This must be what God intends for all humanity.

And when people who don't know Jesus see us living so free, so generously, so full of the power of God, so radically for Jesus, each other, and for the world, they're gonna say, wow, something is really different about this community. Something is really alive here. Something is going on here. What's gotten into you guys?

And we will say with one voice, his name is Jesus.

Jesus, thank you that you give us a vision no less than healing the world through your power. And Lord, thank you that you have assembled so many people and so many gifts and so many resources in this church. So Jesus, help us to be good stewards of it in our own personal lives and corporately together.

Lord, help us to follow you wherever you call us to see your power unleashed in our lives, in our homes, in our families, in our church, in our neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, in our world. And Lord, thank you that you give us the dignity of responsibility, the privilege of getting to be part of it, and watching you work through us and giving us that bigger life you died and rose again to give us. Thank you for the privilege, Jesus. In your name. Amen.

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following (note: we use the same scripture reflection questions each week so that we can practice using the same tools over time as we examine different scriptures)

- What do we learn about God's story in this passage?
- What do we learn about our story in this passage?

Talk:

- Keep it simple. If someone asked, "Why Jesus?" what 90-second story would you tell?
- What really holds you back: fear of awkwardness, not knowing enough, worrying how you'll sound?

Action Plan:

Review the action prompt below, share any initial ideas of how you might pursue this practice this week.

- When the moment opens, don't explain Christianity. Simply tell your true story: "Here's what Jesus did in my life..."

No pressure to convince. Just witness.

Closing Group Prayer:

Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement for the week ahead.