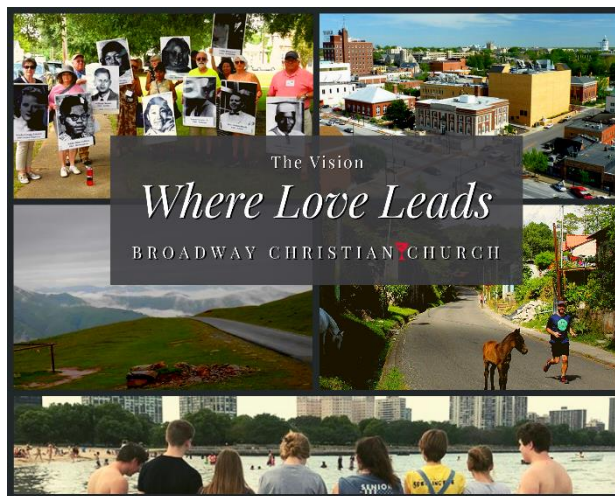


BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JANUARY 10, 2021
WHERE LOVE LEADS



The Scripture
Habakkuk 2:2-3

Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.

The Message
Where Love Leads: Be Thou Our Vision
Mark Briley

Broad Hearts. Broad Minds. Broad Reach. Broadway Christian Church. *Where Love Leads.* We pray these will soon become familiar mantras for us at Broadway. Simple words with broad impact. *Vision.*

How did we get here? You get 12 people in a room for 12 months with a hope and a prayer, and it can be an intimidating journey. We started that journey a year ago at Broadway... no notion of a pandemic whatsoever. In fact, the church building was so full of people from church and community groups that we couldn't find a convenient time and space to meet in the church building. So, 2020 launches; we gather in an upper room... far corner, second floor of the CLC... squeezed into a small room, uncertain but eager, some of the 12 were long friends, some meeting for the first time... some finding Broadway decades ago and serving in about every leadership capacity possible at the church over time... and others who are relatively new to the mix, serving in such a way for the first time.

Everyone at that table had a different entry point, a different passion, a different connection, and a different wondering about who we could become together. Our personalities and experiences varied greatly. Our theological backgrounds and even current stances were broad as well. Seventy years spanned the age of our youngest to eldest teammates. How could we possibly come together, representing the broad swath of people that make up our beloved church and say, “*Here. This. This is our identity. This is who God is calling us to be in this time; in this season.*”

It’s a big gulp moment. And it was all that you imagine it was. There were often differences of opinion, approach, and semantics. And yet... early on... we agreed that we wouldn’t be voting on a Vision. It wasn’t majority rules. It wasn’t “*loudest voice wins.*” It wasn’t about pulling rank or forcing agendas or even silent ballots. We agreed, as a team, to discern this effort together... listening to God... listening to the congregation... listening to each other. And after reading books about culture, and church, and vision... after engaging hundreds of you from Broadway in open Zoom meetings, small group conversations, phone calls, and opportunities for each and every person passionate about Broadway to submit their ideas... and while Broadway’s Prayer Team met to pray in our Outdoor Worship Space every time the Vision Team would meet, we came to spiritual agreement about who we believe we are as a people of faith at Broadway and what God might open before our efforts in the coming years.

Coming to a place of spiritual agreement is a commitment. It meant that, at times, we thought we were on to something and collectively discerned, “*This is not it.*” Such a place can be tough. But it also meant that when the team landed in a place of spiritual agreement, the spiritual energy was palpable. There were cheers and tears because... “*Yes. This. Yes. In this season. Yes. Now.*”

And so, we launch a six-week sermon series today on the Vision as it has come to be among us. And before I say another word, I want to name and thank God for this representative group of Broadway faithful who championed this process. Led by *Ed Stansberry* and *Deb Ward*, the team included *Colleen Colaner*, *Kristen Crews*, *Darren Day*, *Roger Fisher*, *Brent Ghan*, *Alison Hall*, *Tricia Marchack*, *Phil Schoo*, *Sandy Stallman*, and *Karen Weaver*. You were faithful to the process and brought the best of your hearts, minds, and souls to the effort for which we are all grateful.

How do you begin to share such a Vision? How do we even talk about Vision itself? Is it in us? Can it be yet? Lots of questions as we launch into this season together. There are plenty of biblical examples that can inform us, of course. The famed Proverb (29:18) has long been quoted by people of faith and by many who claim no faith at all: “*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*” Whether a church, a business, a non-profit, collectively, or individually, we’re designed to live forward into something greater

than ourselves and when do we need such vision more than we need it now? 2020 was long linked to a sense of *perfect* vision.

Everyone and their pet hamster had a 2020 Vision -- a plan with a play on the optical gift of seeing with 20/20 clarity. But 2020 came, and it was time for many to re-imagine the future. This was before the unexpected chaos that would come to be synonymous with 2020, and yes... even in these early days of 2021. In the aftermath, we are challenged to imagine a new world, a new vision, a new picture of life and faith.

The pandemic undoubtedly shifted the shape of our Vision process. It forced many questions that could have easily been skirted in typical times. But this is frontier territory. The old norms are gone. And questions of Vision or perish have been raised in every aspect of society with new intensity. We can ignore the impact of it all with hopes to return to life and church as it were, or we can step with courageous faith into a new world that is opening before us.

This may be sort of like Saul felt when he was on the road to Damascus. He had a vision for his life. His passion and direction were going 100 miles per hour in a particular direction against the Way of Jesus and then boom... like being struck with lightning... he would open his eyes to a brand new world, and he couldn't go back to the way his life was before. Couldn't do it. Literally losing his vision for a time was apparently necessary for him to reset, to open his eyes anew, and see a new possibility.

The pandemic brought a similar reality. We can't ignore what is happening and how it is shifting the world... and in the pause... in the blinding pain of all that we continue to walk through as a nation. What is God's invitation to see now?

Enter the prophet Habakkuk to this conversation. Habakkuk isn't a name that you may be all that familiar with, and it's certainly not one that rolls easily off the tongue. Not many name their children after the prophet Habakkuk, you know? I trust it's more the name than anything to do with the prophet himself. Habakkuk is a people's prophet.

So many prophets stand above, casting aggressive expectations, if not harsh judgment, on the people of God. Not Habakkuk. He stands alongside of us and asks God to make clearer sense. "*I'm all ears, God,*" he says. "*Give us a word!*" Habakkuk waits and listens, which is the first work of any visioning process. What happens next? God answers: "*Write this. Write it out in big block letters so it can be read on the run. This vision-message is a witness pointing to what's coming.*" We've waited as a people. We've listened as a people. Are we ready for what's coming?

Write it big. Write it clear.... So, it can be seen on the run. Have you ever seen your name on a big sign? Maybe you've arrived at the airport and someone is standing there with a big sign with your name on it. They are waiting to take you somewhere. Or

maybe you've run a race where spectators have lined the streets to encourage you on. I've seen some interesting signs along race routes over time. Some make you laugh... like the one who had written in big letters, "*Congratulations, you are the slowest person to make it to this point so far,*" which of course was true for every person who passed them at the time. It was a bit of a jab, of course, but good for a chuckle that propelled you through the next leg of the race. Some signs could be more frustrating than inspiring but, in the end, it was only legible if it was written plain enough, in big enough letters, to be read... *on the run*. A Billboard has a few short words or phrases to sum up the Vision they want you to catch when you're going 70-miles-an-hour on the interstate. God tells Habakkuk: "*You need to be that clear.*"

After hours of prayer and conversation and listening to you, the people who make up the heartbeat of Broadway, our Vision Team wanted to make plain the identity we felt best described our Christian outpost at this time in our life together. It needed to be clear and plain, so that our youngest disciples and our most seasoned saints could read it, name it, claim it, and repeat it easily. We came up with any number of ideas. How do you capture it all in a few words?

Some of the options sound even a little strange now as the words became so clear. It's sort of like learning about the other actors who were possible choices for the lead role in one of your favorite movies.



We watched an episode of "*The Movies that Made Us*" over the Christmas break. It was the back story of the Christmas movie, *Elf*, which is a favorite in our house. Buddy the Elf is played by Will Ferrell, and it's hard to imagine any other actor in that role now. However, the first folks who bought rights to the screenplay had imagined someone more like Chris Farley playing that role, making it

more of an adult, edgy type of film. The writer, however, imagined a family film and waited them out until the contract expired so another could buy the rights. Could have still been a good film and funny no doubt, but it feels strange on this side of it.

What became clear for us? **Love**. There wasn't a single conversation with the congregation or among the team that wasn't confident about love as the ultimate guiding force in the life of Christ, and therefore, in the life of those who claim to follow him. How could we write that in big, clear, plain letters? We landed on the tagline: *Where Love Leads*. That's it. *Where Love Leads*. Would you say it out loud at home with me now? "*Where Love Leads.*"

We felt nothing better described our identity as Christians and as the Christian mission outpost that is Broadway Christian Church. The double entendre was all the better...

our hope that those seeking the ways of Love might be led to Broadway, and a commitment that whatever Broadway would do or be about would be led by Love.

Jesus said to love God and love neighbor was the greatest commandment. John, in his first epistle, said plainly, “*God is love.*” Nothing was clearer to the team than love being the guiding force of who we are. It’s not to be a mushy thing... or even a soft reality. Love is hard. The Apostle Paul described all the things that Love is – patient and kind, not arrogant or rude... doesn’t insist on its own way. Love isn’t proud. Love doesn’t dishonor others. And the list goes on.

When faced with direction, response, plans as a church...we want to measure it against what love requires. “*How would love lead in this situation?*” Broadway Christian Church... *Where Love Leads...* will be our guiding mantra... and we hope you’ll join us in claiming this as the force that drives us forward.

In your Vision Packet, you also found three Core Values that would support this guiding mantra. *Broad Hearts. Broad Minds. Broad Reach.* Our existing and future ministry teams will connect with one of these values (*even as we know many will be a beautiful intersection of all three of them*).

The next three sermons will flesh these core values out respectively. The Broad components of each are a play on our address... the very name of the church of course... the nature of the word itself which is grounded in a broadening which means to enlarge the range or magnitude of something. Disciples of Jesus have hearts that are always expanding to welcome others into the mix, minds that are never satisfied to quit learning, and a reach to the community that magnifies our call to serve as Christ served.

While we were in the throes of semantics and word searches and “*this word works but that one has baggage*”, etc., Pastor Terry, pulled from the files of her heart (*and also a church cabinet*) and discovered some old notes from a previous moment in time that included a play on Broad... and all came together in a moment that said, “*Yes. This. Write it in plain, big letters.*” And so, we tweaked and sketched, and nothing was all that fuzzy anymore. This is us. *Broad Hearts. Broad Minds. Broad Reach.* Broadway Christian Church... *Where Love Leads.* More on this as we dive further into the series.

As clarity of this identity was embraced, it became the focus of the team to imagine a picture of what a faith community, grounded in such an essence, in a post-pandemic’d world, might look like. Thus... the Master Narrative ... the several pages of future-oriented story included in your packet. It was a lot, right? And there weren’t page numbers... I’m sorry about that... and it was big-gulp stuff. Some read it and said, “*Yes! We can do it!*” Some read it and said, “*No! Impossible.*” Some read it and said, “*We’ve got this problem, and this need right now, and you want us to do what?*” Any Vision that doesn’t elicit such responses isn’t much of a Vision. Let me remind you...

the Master Narrative is just a possible picture of a community, who is grounded in the identity we have claimed. It's just one dream; one manifestation of a community grounded in such essence.

What kind of dream can you imagine? Glennon Doyle says, "*Imagination is how personal and worldwide revolutions begin.*" "*I have a dream,*" said Martin Luther King, Jr. "*Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning,*" said Gloria Steinem. If we can't imagine a dream that is bigger than any one of us could imagine alone, then it seems we have missed the mark.

This Master Narrative is about our essence... an essence that relies on collaboration... that leans into the community... that is outward focused... that would require God-sized courage. King's dream was also followed with the word that "*The arc of the moral universe bends toward justice.*" I saw this week, a retort, however, that says, "*The arc of the moral universe isn't going to bend itself. So, get involved.*" That is our call. That is our opportunity. That's the Vision. And is it big? Absolutely. Are we capable of big things? It was Jesus who said, "*Nothing is impossible with God.*"

Look. We were working on the launch of this series, and the filming of this service took place on the heels of one of the most terrible days our country has ever lived through. And in the space between this filming and your experience of it now, Lord only knows what has transpired. "*Should we shift the series?*" we debated. Should we stop the Vision launch? Should we simply sit and pray? Any of those things could have been okay, may have been right, and could be helpful. But we decided to press through... because this is who we are. Our identity is love... and it is ours to proclaim and nothing can separate us from the love of God we have come to know in Christ. And no matter the darkness, Love can't be snuffed out. The dream of Love leading the world forward must be professed.



Mahalia Jackson, known as the Queen of Gospel and the "*soundtrack of the civil rights movement,*" was a close friend of Martin Luther King, Jr., and partners on the march for civil rights. When King would be discouraged, he would



call Jackson just to hear her sing. She was the voice behind him when he was speaking on those famed steps in Washington. He had gotten a little tripped up in his words and was trying to balance what he was to say to a broad audience in the allotted five minutes. But in that moment of uncertainty, it is Jackson's voice you can hear on the recording behind King that shouts, "*Tell 'em about*

the dream, Martin!" And he did. And his words have been sung, and memorized, and retold, and posterized; because the dream matters; the Gospel matters, bearing the Light matters.

In this moment that I'm saying these words, I do not know what will have transpired in our country as you're watching this service now. I know more of our friends have COVID. I know I will have walked with another family to bury their beloved in the cemetery. I know many are heartbroken, scared, angry, and wondering if the fight is still worth it. Who knows? Maybe I will have shaved! I don't know. And I can't answer these tough questions for you, and I admit to wrestling with it myself... but if we can't profess that "*Love wins,*" and "*Justice prevails,*" then who will?

If we can't be a people of *Broad Hearts, Broad Minds, and Broad Reach...* then who will? If Broadway cannot embody LOVE in a complex world, then who will? If we can't be a place *Where Love Leads,* then what are here to do? And so... we keep living the Vision, and we end where we started today, with God's words through the prophet Habakkuk: "*Write this. Write what you see. Write it out in big block letters so that it can be read on the run. This vision-message is a witness pointing to what's coming. It aches for the coming—it can hardly wait! And it doesn't lie. If it seems slow in coming, wait. It's on its way. It will come right on time.*"

May it be so. Amen.

Song of Response
"Where Love Leads"
Words and Music: Ed Varnum

Proverbs 29:18

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

Habakkuk 2:2 Paraphrased

1. Write the vision big and bold,
so that none will miss it, so all will behold.
And let it be spoken to any who will hear.
Proclaim it and teach it far and near.

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

2. Be our vision, Lord of all,
your compassion as our call.
With our eyes open to this world's needs,
let your vision guide to where love leads.

(Continues on the next page.)

Tune: Be Thou My Vision

3. God, be our vision as love I our creed.
In Christ's compassion, lead to this world's need.
Our faithful witness in word and in deed,
let vision guide us to where love leads.