

"GRANDER VISION LIVING"

Colossians 4:2-6

Well, it is true, today brings to a close our four-week journey as we have been talking about sharing our faith, doing the "E" word, Evangelism, telling someone who might be far away from God about the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ. I'm glad you are here today because I've saved the best for last. Just three weeks ago we began to ask the question, What if evangelism really was as simple and straightforward as... what? You got it, a "walk across the room." We talked about sharing with others about their Creator and lover of their souls, God Himself. We looked at what it means to "live in 3D" where we talked about the first D which is **Developing Friendships**, the second D is **Discovering Stories** and the third D is **Discerning Appropriate Next Steps**. These are the three things we can be thinking about as we move into the **Zone of the Unknown**. And we have talked about the importance of going slow with people, letting the other person be in the spotlight and not you or me, and how crucial it is to

allowing the Holy Spirit to lead the encounter. We discussed the power of story and focused in on how much weight our words carry and then, how critical it is that we tell well God's story and our own story of before-and-after we can to faith. Today we finish up talking about **Grander Vision**

Living. And a question for each of us is, "How do we maintain the momentum we have gained over the past 3 weeks?" How do we as a people of God, individually and collectively as a congregation keep a fire for evangelism burning for the long-haul, not just for a few days, or weeks or months but for years? How do we keep this going so that it can truly be the engine that drives us to change our thinking and our habits as we think about personal evangelism? Today is about you and me casting a Grander Vision so that every day we will be thinking of ways to plant seeds with people who do not know God or have moved away from God. So let's begin.

First, does anyone need a vacation? I know I sure do, so come along with me on our "pretend vacation." Imagine we are on a tiny island in the

Bahamas and the first thing you want to do is go snorkeling. So there you are, all equipped with mask, fins, water socks and your swimsuit- and ladies, your swimsuit fits perfectly- now this is your kind of vacation, right? The boat driver knows right where to go. You jump into the water and you are floating along the top of the beautiful deep, blue ocean. You are in heaven on earth as you float peacefully along. So let's pause right here- a question: is there anything wrong with this picture? Anything wrong? Absolutely not. It is the perfect vacation and the perfect setting and it's a beautiful day; all is good. But what if I were to say to you that right beneath the surface of the water, right down there, you are missing out on an unbelievable universe of activity? Let's return to this imaginary vacation- so you fix your mask, you cup your lips around your breathing tube, roll onto your belly, kick up your legs, you dip your face into the edge that separates the warmth of the sky from the cool water below. Wow- do you feel that? And you now take in your new surroundings and you begin to ask yourself- Where did all

these fish come from? Why didn't I feel them if they were this close to me all along? Is that a barracuda? And as you push it aside you swim into a huge school of blue and neon yellow angelfish. And it is magnificent. And as you continue your dive you see two reef sharks, a green moray and the bright gold reef below reaching up from the ocean floor. And you realize you can see all the way down. But now it is time to surface and you pop back up and lift your face above the water and you are on the ocean's surface once again. And you realize just how much of a contrast you have witnessed. You dip your head back under the water filled with movement and activity and challenge and vibrancy. Only to pop your head back up to serenity. Back under colorful complexity and back up, silence. So, you go back and forth and if you had to choose, above the water and below the water, which is the better view?

Friends, the issue is this- there is so much more to life than what appears on the surface and I want to challenge us all to take in the "Grander

Vision.” But what is the Grander Vision? Well, keeping a nautical theme, let’s turn in our Bibles to Luke 5 and look at this story that might be familiar and I’d like to suggest two observations and a challenge. OK? Read Luke 5:1-11.

Now that was quite a fishing story, wouldn’t you agree? Peter, James and John hit the jackpot for fishermen, did they not? You can almost hear Jesus laughing as he tries to get the fellows attention while they are celebrating their catch. He might have said something like, “Hey, you think that was big, bringing in all those fish. I want you to think even bigger, more grander thoughts than catching fish. I am inviting you right now, right this very minute to become, are you ready for this- fishers of men and women. I want to invite you, instead of investing your precious time and energy catching six-inch fish, I want to invite you to go after those under 6 foot. I want you to give up everything you have and are for the sake of

people's souls. So come along with me, and you'll see what real living is all about!"

Jesus had an interesting way of getting the attention of these men to recruit them to go out fishing for the souls of men and women. And ever since that day Jesus has been asking all kinds of people everywhere, be it career fishermen or businessmen, or bus drivers, or stay-at-home moms or dad, or beauticians, or policemen and policewomen, or whomever you want to fill in the blanks to go fishing. But the question is are we going to spend our life going after small fish or will we venture out and toss our nets with the idea of catching the human-sized ones?

Observation #1: **People are the priority.** I tend to think that Jesus wanted to make sure his three career fishermen compatriots, as well as the fine people of First Presbyterian Church of Akron understand that this life of ours is all about people. When we are engaged in Grandeur Vision Living, it is always, always about people, they are priority. Christ wanted His disciples,

and us to make people the priority. That is what our 4 weeks have been about as we take walks across rooms for people, caring more about others than ourselves. In our every-day life situations the question for us is, **Will I choose the Grander Vision** as I think about being a walk-across-the room person?

Think about what Jesus said in Matthew 5:16 when He said, "Let your light shine before others in such a way that they may see your good works and then give glory to your Father who is in heaven." I think what Jesus means by this is that He wants people to come to know God because of how we dealt with them, how we treated them, how we interacted with them, how we prioritized them.

Somehow I think God would say to each of us, "You can catch fish where you can spend all your time netting some scaly, underwater creatures that can be taken to market for a few dollars. That is OK.

But there is another option- you can become fishers of men and women where you are more concerned with destinies than dollars.

Go back with me to Matthew 5:16 when Jesus was talking about light- whose light is He talking about? He said, "Let YOUR light shine." Not my light or the person next to you, but YOUR light. Each of us has a part to play and if we would all do just the small thing we can do, we would touch lives. Bill Hybles, the author of the book we are using as a backdrop to this series once said, "You don't have to be any more talented, any richer, any slimmer, any smarter, any more or less of anything to partner with God. All we have to be is willing...."

Jesus wants us to live the Grand Vision so that the kingdom gets built, but also because this is the way our souls get satisfied. Friends, once we get the Grand Vision perspective we will not want to float on the smooth, silent, serene surface of the ocean again. We will not get all jumping for joy about catching a few paltry perch like before.

We will not get caught up with amassing a few more dollars. Why? Because these things will no longer satisfy our souls.

Observation #2: **Potential is the focus.** We should always be focusing on potential. Jesus didn't get hung up on the fact that His soon-to-be disciples were teenagers whose first response to his commands was not what Jesus might have had in mind. I mean after Jesus asked them to put their nets over the boat to catch fish they responded with, "We have worked all night long but have caught nothing." It is almost as if they were saying to Jesus, "Hey, Buddy, who do you think we are? We know these waters; we're the experts here. And now you want us to listen to you about catching fish?" And yet Jesus saw all the potential in these men. Jesus saw the bigger picture of what these guys could be like once they chose to live the Grand Vision. Jesus was willing to look past self-centeredness and see potential for servant hood. He was willing to look past the rebelliousness

and see the potential for righteousness. Jesus was willing to look past the quicker temper and see potential for kingdom building.

Friends, all of us have things from our past that we wish never would have happened or been a part of our lives. But that is past and we can give thanks to the Lord that He has accepted us, embraced us and covered us with His grace. I know there are people that I have learned to embrace all because I look at them through the eyes of Christ, because if I look at them through my eyes it is not pretty. That is why I pray we all approach people with radical inclusiveness, the same kind of inclusiveness that God showed forth to me and you where God was willing to look beyond our sinfulness and see something valuable so that He was willing to embrace us and take us in. Remember a few weeks ago we talked about God having no "hate list?"

Turn again with me to Luke 5:27 and following as we see this story unfold for a tax collector by the name of Levi.

One day Jesus was out and about and He saw a tax collector there at his tax booth and Jesus told the fellow to, "Follow me." So what did Levi do? He followed Jesus. Do you think Levi's friends thought Levi was nuts? I mean here was Levi, a successful tax collector leaving his lucrative business to follow a homeless rabbi. But Jesus knew; choosing the Grand Vision over lesser visions leads to a wealth that the world would only wish it could offer. And Jesus said to Levi, "Follow me." And the tax collector walked away from his open cash register and went with Christ. Think of this- Levi walked away from his business, his identity, his comforts and his financial security and followed Jesus. And he left the known for the unknown, even though Levi wasn't sure what that meant but as time went along Levi realized he was going to live the Grand Vision. This leads me to my challenge.

The challenge- **Start Small, just start!** Maybe you're like Levi and you are ready to get started living the Grand Vision life.

You are all squared away with people being priority and focusing on potential, but you are a little fuzzy about where you are to go from here.

And if Levi were standing here he would totally agree. He had signed on with Jesus and now he had a deep desire to share with others the love and acceptance and purpose and hope that he had found in Jesus Christ. Had he had a crash course on Evangelism 101? NO! But he had all these old friends who were also tax collectors who stood at similar tax booths and were just hanging around at their tax collectors' booths, just like he had only a few days before. And Levi believed and knew that their lives would be blessed if they came to know Christ but how was he going to introduce them to Jesus? He is now in a newfound Circle of Comfort with other new disciples but his old buddies were now in the unknown zone and it bothered him. And you are not going to believe what he decides to do. Friends, here is what he did- he took a walk and he decided to "Give" something- which was contrary to his former self as a tax collector, you see, they weren't in

the habit of giving, only receiving- and that was taxes. So **what did Levi give**, and maybe, maybe not that this was something he was good at but nevertheless he did it- **he gave a party**. Now maybe some of you are relieved to know that this approach to evangelism involves partying. And this party had a bunch of his old tax collector buddies with his new buddies, the followers of Jesus and Levi brought the two groups together. And he was just hoping that some of his new buddies- the Christ followers, would walk across the room to some of his old buddies- the tax collectors, and maybe something would happen; maybe some seeds would be planted and maybe, sometime down the road, a few of his old buddies, those tax collectors would come to faith all because of a simple party. That would be great, no?

Friends- here is the reality- Levi, after agreeing to follow Jesus could have stayed totally with his new-found friends, who were Christ-followers and forgotten his old tax collector buddies. But he didn't. He made those

outside the family of God a priority; those who were far away from God but who desperately needed God, who needed acceptance, who needed Christian friendship, who needed grace. Levi had a right view of his role in the lives of his friends. Did Levi have his act all together? No! But he did have the hope of heaven figured out and that reality caused him to take action and throw a party. Levi knew that it was bigger than just him, it was more than just being about his own salvation. He was to be salt and light in a dark world and it all was because he had a Grander Vision.

Folks, this world and all the things of this world are temporary. We are temporary and so the question is, when we take our last earthly breath and life as we know on this earth ceases, where will we be, after that? Jesus Christ taught that every human being would be resurrected to spend an eternity in community with God in heaven or in isolation from God in hell. And since Jesus understood these eternal realities and believed them, He

focused his attention on the only entity that would extend into the next reality and that was PEOPLE.

So friends, I pray you will choose to embrace Grander Vision Living where we walk across the room to begin to engage people in a conversation about the greatest gift of all- Jesus Christ.

Last week I gave you a challenge to write your faith story in 100 words or less. Today, I challenge you to dip your mask into the water and catch a glimpse of an exciting, vibrant, active world and do what Levi did- why not you, throw a party? In the next 30 days I challenge each of us to throw a "Levi party" and invite some friends who are Christ-followers and some friends who maybe unconvinced and see what happens. Make sure you have fewer Christ-followers than nonbelievers. Let's all work on grander vision living and see what God can do. Amen.

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Introduction: Closing out our four-week journey on evangelism

Question: How do we maintain the momentum we have gained?

Going on a "pretend vacation" with Mark

There is so much more to life than what appears on the surface- take in the "Grander Vision"

Luke 5:1-11

Observation #1: _____ **are the priority**

Will I choose the Grander Vision as I think about being a walk-across-the-room person?

Matthew 5:16

Observation #2: _____ **is the focus**

Luke 5:27 and following

The challenge: **Start _____, Just Start!**

What did Levi give? **He gave a _____**

The world and the things of this world are _____

Conclusion: today's challenge- throw a _____ within the next 30 days