

*Arvada*  
United Methodist Church

February 15, 2009

Without a Vision

Rev. Rusty Butler

Proverbs 29:18 KJV

Without a vision the people perish.

These words are especially poignant this week as one who has shared time and life and his ministry with us has perished. Not only did Rod die, but the added fact that he took his own life gives us pause and reminds us that no matter what the facts are, deeply committed Christians like Rod and ourselves run up against the difficulties of life and we are asked to deal with them daily. That we get to excuse ourselves from the difficulties of life has never been the case for we Christians, life comes at us just like everyone else. And how we answer the great questions of life are as difficult for us as for anyone.

When someone close to us commits suicide, it stops us and reminds us of how tenuous and fragile life can be, how easy it is to drop over into the abyss. And we take time to rethink life and what is and what it means. Today we do just that in the wake of Rod's death.

In his book, *Perceptions*, Rod suggested that it's not so much what happens to us that matters the most—it's how we respond. He wrote, sometimes a few words or a little story can cause us to turn from a destructive course and free us to live in a more peaceful way. I have no doubt that through his ministry, in places like Minneapolis, Omaha, Arvada, Colorado Springs and Red Feather's lakes, through his words, his stories, by his very presence, people were able to live in more peaceful ways. And now, today, we wish that Rod could have heard some few words or some small story so that the course he chose to follow would have been changed.

This morning our hearts go out to Rod's wife Marilyn and their family and their friends, and our thoughts turn to Rod and to others we have known whose lives have intersected with ours and who have left traces of their influence upon us. And we give thanks for what they have given us and what they have meant to us in the past and what they mean to us still.

Would you pray with me?

O God, in the deepest and most difficult times of life, we pray that what we've gained through our living and through our faith, might give us strength and courage to lean into the difficulties, not to let them overwhelm us but to learn and grow from them. We pray that we might be people who can be counted on in the toughest times, and we pray that we might feel vulnerable enough to lean on people when we need just that. Amen.

Today I'm going to talk about that phrase that is found in the book of Proverbs, "Without a vision, the people perish".

Almost all of us have heard that proverb. It is what is written in the King James Version of the bible. Some of you grew up with that version of the bible. Some of us, who grew up with other versions of the bible, never came across that text as many of you know, the

303 421 5135 6750 Carr Street 80004 arvadaumc.org

*A church where science, religion and life are compatible*

# *Arvada* United Methodist Church

Hebrew language is rendered differently in various versions of the bible, that is because in Hebrew there are no vowels and so, the vowels have to be inserted into the text and when that is done...the translations can be different.

In the RSV, the verse is translated, Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint...

In the New English Version, the verse is, Where there is no one in authority, the people break loose...

But my favorite is the Jerusalem Bible, where it says, "Where there is no vision, the people get out of hand!"

When we begin dealing with the topic of vision, we are dealing with something important, something that either makes or breaks a person and a people. It can certainly make or break something like a church.

I had the mistaken and naive perception that when people began talking about a new vision, everyone would get excited, primed, ready to go forward to help frame a new vision, to work on a new vision for Arvada United Methodist Church. That has unfolded in a different way than what I had anticipated.

Alas, my naïve perception came undone in the last couple of weeks when I found that people, yes, people even here at AUMC began to have some anxious reactions around the whole idea of a church wide visioning process. I hadn't reckoned that thinking about casting a vision for AUMC would stir up things like it has.

And here's the most interesting thing to me...We haven't even really started the visioning process, we haven't got a firm date though we are hoping to do it the weekend after Easter on Friday night and Saturday morning the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> (so just pencil that in to your calendars not in pen!). And we haven't hired anyone to help us with the process, thought we will be deciding that this morning after the 10:30 service.

So far, we've really only just begun to think about doing a churchwide vision...and people are getting nervous, anxious about it. The status quo is in danger! I understand that now and what I'm here today to do is to just pour some soothing ointment onto those anxious fires.

As you are probably aware, several areas of the church, including the Trustees, the Worship Committee, the Spiritual Connection group, the Social Concerns area, and the Adult Education committee were all working on various surveys for the wider church. In fact, we conducted the Trustees survey a few weeks ago and are currently interpreting the results.

# *Arvada* United Methodist Church

The thought was that we didn't want to keep hitting you with survey after survey so many of those different surveys will be combined together shortly and shared with you. They are, in my opinion, coming together at this point in time because people are itching to get started on the next chapter of AUMC.

Now that is exciting to both Valerie and myself. Instead of a top down approach to what AUMC will be, both of us want a vision to be shared with all the people who make up this church. Your dreams and visions are every bit as important as ours, perhaps even more because, you stay and as you know we pastors go. That's just the way it is in the United Methodist Church.

There is something to be said, for that adage, Without a vision the people will get out of hand. And we can not have that can we?

I was talking with Dr. Schuster this week. He is in Ft. Collins and was the pastor for about 15 years here. Charles was telling me about vision and about church people. He said he'd recently come across a beautiful pamphlet produced by his hometown church in Morgantown West Virginia. In it they told about having Bishop Frances Asbury come to their church over a series of years in the 1780's. Bishop Asbury was one of the first two Methodist Bishops here in America.

He read me off the report.

In 1784, Bishop Asbury visited the Morgantown church and preached before a great crowd of people.

In 1786 bishop Asbury came and hundreds gathered to hear him preach.

In 1787 bishop Asbury visited and gave a rousing sermon to the people of the church.

In 1788 bishop Asbury preached to a lifeless, disorderly people.

Charles said, those are my people! The lifeless and disorderly.

I guess people can catch a vision and then for whatever reason they can lose it. That is human nature.

Harold Kushner writes in his most recent book, *Overcoming Life's disappointments* that there are three sorts of people: those who dream boldly even as they realize that their dreams will not come true; those who dream more modestly and fear that even their modest dreams may not be realized; and those who are afraid to dream at all, lest they be disappointed.

He wrote, I would wish for more people who dreamed boldly and trusted their powers of resilience to see them through the inevitable disappointments.

Words to ponder as we move forward in our dreaming.

*Arvada*  
United Methodist Church

We can do great things when we dream big. If we don't dream big...we are stuck with doing the small things. Less controversy...but less fun.

There are various vision statements in the bible, they are different in each frame of time.

Moses vision was not only to get the Israelites out of slavery, but also to mold them into a special kind of community, a community dedicated to doing the work and following the will of God as he saw it.

The prophet Micah asked the people, What does the Lord require of us? But to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

For the Disciples the vision statement centered around going and telling people what was happening with Jesus...Do you remember? John's disciples went to Jesus and they asked him are you the one? And he said, go and tell John what you hear and see, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them.

From Paul...Do not be conformed to this world, this age...but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-what is good and acceptable and perfect.

From the book of Revelation...another dream...they will hunger no more and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life and god will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Today we will begin to think about a vision for our church. It will not be an easy task, and it will be debated and talked about, but in the end we can rest assured in this, we live in a land of promise, and when we seek a way forward that honors what has come before, we will walk in the way of our ancestors in faith, we will be true to our tradition of

Loving the neighbor,  
acting in justice,  
following the path of kindness,  
providing shelter from life's storms,  
helping one another through the times in which we live.

And that my friends will be enough. Amen.