

## Visionary or Stationary

Sterling UMC  
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Numbers 13

A story is told of a shoe salesman who was sent to an underdeveloped country in Africa to open the territory. After a few days there he wired back to the company that there is no possibility of doing business here because no one wore shoes. So the company sent another salesman to see if he could do any better. In just a few days they received an enthusiastic telegram with a big order and the message: "Possibilities unlimited. No one has shoes. Stand by for further orders." What made the difference? It was the way the two salesmen looked at the facts before them.

When you hear that story does it sound somewhat familiar? To me it sounds an awful lot like the story we just heard read a moment ago from the Old Testament.

In obedience to the Lord Moses had sent 12 spies into the Promised Land to explore the land and to bring back a report. He gave them specific instructions; "See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they walled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land.

And so they went. For forty days they scouted the Land of Canaan. When they returned from their expedition they reported that the Promised Land, was indeed magnificent. It was a land flowing with milk and honey. They brought back a cluster of grapes so large that it took two of them to carry it on a pole between them. But they also brought back news of the people who inhabited the land. They were powerful. And not only were they powerful they were large, descendants of Anak, a race of giants. And their cities were large and well fortified. On these things all twelve of the spies agreed. But that is where the agreement stopped.

Ten of the spies looked at the circumstances and said, in effect, "We can't do it. We can't attack those people. They are bigger than we are. They are stronger than we are. We seemed like grasshoppers compared to them. It's impossible." And guess what happened? The negativity spread like a cancer among the people and they began to grumble and complain. It caused a great rebellion among the people. They went to Moses and said, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert. Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us die by the sword? Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" Have you ever heard that before?

But Caleb and Joshua were different. They had a vision of the future and nothing; no obstacle was going to stand in their way. Caleb said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it!"

What made the difference? How is it that two groups can be in the same place at the same time and both see things entirely different? How can we all live under the same sky, and yet not all have the same horizon."

It's simple. Some were visionaries. They were ready to receive. But most were stationary and feared going forward.

I want to speak to you about those two words this morning; Stationary or visionary. Let me define the two words. Visionary means to be characterized by vision or by foresight, moving forward, moving ahead. "What else can we do? How can we do it better?" That's visionary.

Now the word stationary means simply not moving. It means unchanged. I've heard the word visionary defined in the Christian realm. It's one who sees what can be done for God and has enough passion for God to do it.

I want to ask you a question this morning. Are you visionary or are you stationary? How about Sterling United Methodist Church? Is it stationary or is it visionary? Are we looking for ways we can improve our church? Do we have an eye toward the future looking, searching for ways in which we can further, and better minister for the Lord?

Or.....are we willing to settle for status quo? Just enough to get by, and nothing more! Unwilling to change, unmoving and unyielding in our own lives and having no desire to see the work of God advance! That's stationary.

I believe that all believers should be visionaries. I don't believe that the word stationary should be in the vocabulary of the believer.

In our text today, the children of Israel are poised to enter the promised land. So long they have traveled, and waited for this day. Victory is just over the hill....just around the bend. However, they would fail to enter. Instead of entering the promised land they would be cursed with wandering in the wilderness for 40 years because those who would be stationary outnumbered those who were visionary.

Helen Keller was once asked, "What would be worse than being born blind?" She replied, "To have sight without vision." The Bible says, "Where there is no vision the people perish." There must be that compelling vision, a sense of mission and purpose that motivates, energizes, and unifies. Without a powerful vision, the church ultimately reflects the hopelessness and despair of the world around it. Without vision, congregations become like barnacles. The barnacle begins its life as a free-swimming creature in salt water. Eventually it fastens itself to a rock or a piling, builds a hard shell around itself, and spends the rest of its life kicking food into its mouth in order to merely survive.

What about us? Are we visionary or are we stationary? What is holding us back? What is keeping us from realizing our dream? What is keeping us from being truly a visionary church?

Well, I think we can find some answers from our text this morning. When you look at the story you first see some characteristics of a stationary people.

### 1. They are pessimistic. V26-28

When the 12 returned from spying out the land, they carried fruit from the land. They had a cluster of grapes so large that it took two men to carry it on a pole between them. They acknowledged that the land was one flowing with milk and honey. But notice that one word in V28 defines their outlook and attitude. That word is "nevertheless". Don't you just hate it when someone is telling you something, and then they insert the word, "nevertheless, however, or but".

In spite of their reasons to be optimistic, and opportunistic, 10 of the spies choose to be stationary. They become pessimistic. You cannot be a visionary with negativity.

"The optimist sees the doughnut, The pessimist sees the hole." What is it that you see when you look at the Lord's work? The work of the church?

### 2. They are phobic.

The person who is stationary is not only pessimistic, but is also phobic. They live a life that is governed by fear rather than by faith. Notice the attitudes of the 10 who were stationary. (V28) "the people be strong.....the cities are walled(or guarded) ....." they are giants and we are grasshoppers. They were living a life that was governed by fear and not by faith. Are you governed by fear? Are we governed by fear? Fear will paralyze us both in our personal lives, in our service for Christ, and in our Church life. We must not be a people controlled by fear, but people who are compelled by our faith in Jesus Christ!

### 3. They are powerless. V31-33

....."We be not able to go up against the people for they are stronger than we are." Literally: We do not have the power !

They were right in this regard. They did not have the power but they did have the promise of God. They had God's power. On our own we don't have the power. We may have the ability, skills and talents. But all of those things as good as they are will do it on their. But we as believers have the power of God...

The stationary people saw the giants. But the visionary people look past the Giants they saw God. What are you focused on in your life? The reasons the excuses why not? What are you focused on? The Giants? Or God? Those who choose to remain stationary are powerless because they do not factor in the

power of God.

What are the characteristics Of Those Who Are Visionary?

1. They live committed to the principles of God. 14:24

A visionary has at his very heart the vision of God, and his word. He is first, and foremost committed to the principles of God, and when one is committed to the principles of God he will always be in the advance mode. Caleb was a man who is said to have followed the Lord fully. He is referred to by the Lord as my servant!

2. Their lives are controlled by the presence of God.

What enabled Caleb to be a committed man to the Lord? How as he able to stand up and say let's go up when all the others were saying we can't do it? The secret lies within the fact that he had another spirit with him. That spirit was the Spirit of almighty God. The Spirit of God will give us courage to stand up, speak up, and get up! He will give us the power to speak out against unbelief, and the power to be positive instead of pessimistic. He will give us a Spirit of faith rather than fear!

3. They lay claim to the promises of God 13:30

Caleb had heard the promises of God. There was a piece of land awaiting him with his name on it in the Promised Land, and he was determined to lay claim to it. A visionary perceives the promises of God, and is driven by them.

It would come 45 years later, but eventually Caleb would receive his mountain!

4. They leave conquering to the power of God. 14:8-9

What about the giants Caleb? What about the enemies with the fortified cities? The Lord will be with us, and will give it to us. Caleb was committed to following the Lord, and leaving the conquering up to him. Are we willing to do the same? You know why we can't whip the giants in our lives? Is it because God can't? No, it's because we wont let him. We wont let him because we refuse to believe his word, and refuse to obey him.

Let me tell you a little bit about my vision, about my dream for our church.

- I envision a church that is on fire for Jesus Christ.
- I envision a people who have a hunger and thirst to learn and grow as true disciples.
- I envision a community of faith gathering with a sense of excitement and anticipation to worship the living God.

- I envision a body of believers where every person is actively involved in ministry using his or her gifts for the work of building God's kingdom.
- I envision this church as a place where everyone regardless of their age, gender, race, or nationality is welcomed and embraced as a person of worth and value.
- I envision this church as a place where people know they can come to find answers to their questions, help for their problems, healing for their pain, forgiveness for their sin, and hope for their future.
- I envision our church as a people that don't wait for people to come to us but instead go into our community and our world to carry the good news of Jesus Christ.

I want to talk with you for just a moment about one aspect of my dream for our church. It has to do with worship.

I dream of a Sunday where this sanctuary is full, not on Easter Sunday. Where people crave being present in worship, where they want to be here. Where they look forward to Sunday, not as an opportunity to sleep in and take it easy, but as the day that we look forward to the opportunity to actually get gather with our brothers and sisters here and experience God's presence.

Did you know that on Easter Sunday, we average over 750 here in our worship services? On Christmas Eve we are up over 900 in our four services? Why is it that we cannot average even half of that on a regular Sunday? How about even an increase of 15%, from around 350 up to 400?

The stationary person would say:

- That's not possible. People are just not that committed. They're lazy and they have too many other things going on. Or the preaching's not that good. I don't like the music. I don't like the format. They would be pessimistic.

The visionary person on the other hand would say:

- With God all things are possible. Our services have something relevant to offer, they're inspiring. I come expecting something great. I experience God here. I can invite someone to join me one Sunday.

How do we make it happen? You see it takes more than vision. A lot of people can talk a good game but when it comes time to step on the field they can't deliver. It takes action.

My friends the challenge is before us. It is no easy task. But you know what? We can get bigger. We can get better.

We are building his church. God has placed before us a magnificent future. There is so much potential in this congregation that it is not even funny. He has so many things for us to accomplish. So many ways that God wants to use us to

make a difference in this community and this world. We cannot afford to be stationary. We cannot afford to simply maintain the status quo. We must be visionary and claim the future that God has set before us. May today we embrace the vision that Christ has placed before us, strengthen ourselves in the unity of love and fellowship, and equip ourselves to take the necessary action to press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.

To quote John Lennon, "You may say I'm a dreamer"... but I don't believe I'm the only one."