

## **Building Church Beyond Walls**

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher

October 18, 2020

Zechariah 2:1–5

Prophets are a varied and sometimes odd lot! Their message comes from God. They use whatever means possible to get their point across. Some use the direct approach, telling the people that they have gotten off the track and consequences will happen if they don't straighten up! Others use visual aids to get God's point across. Others, like Zechariah, offer a vision, a description of what is possible. Tucked into the shorter books of the Old Testament one of what we have come to know as the "minor prophets" are Zechariah. But the words in these shorter books is far from Minor. In the words of these prophets we are told about the Messiah that is to come. Whatever the methodology these prophets speak God's words their time and to us.

Today's scripture includes the words that set the theme for our Gifts and Gratitude pledge drive. It is a vision that Zechariah has that changes the world view. God's place is greater than the people of Israel is able to set or define. God's place is beyond the walls of the sacred city. Listen to the vision of Zechariah

### **Zechariah 2:1-5**

<sup>1</sup>I looked up and saw a man with a measuring line in his hand. <sup>2</sup>Then I asked, "Where are you going?" He answered me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length." <sup>3</sup>Then the angel who talked with me came forward, and another angel came forward to meet him, <sup>4</sup>and said to him, "Run, say to that young man: Jerusalem shall be inhabited like villages without walls, because of the

multitude of people and animals in it. <sup>5</sup>For I will be a wall of fire all around it, says the LORD, and I will be the glory within it.”

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Since this is a year like no other, we need to have a pledge season like no other. In years past I could rely on your Minnesota politeness not to get up and leave the sanctuary when I started talking about pledging and giving. But now you can do what you want! You can get coffee. You can press pause you can turn me off. Better yet, you can scroll to look at cute puppies and I would never know! How can I grab and keep your attention?

For help, I turn to the Old Testament prophets. They have a message to give and their challenge was how to get the people to listen. They did not even have microphones, let alone the crack audio visual and light teams that we have. They used their words, their convictions and their very lives. Most of the time they had a message that people did not want to hear. The prophets chose their most effective medium to get their point across.

Today we read from Zechariah who offers a vision in a turbulent difficult time. He talks about walls; we know about walls. No one living in this country can escape the subject of walls. Walls have been politicized so that our country is divided just by a simple phrase. The walls that we are talking about are the human made walls around the city of Jerusalem. The walls around Jerusalem provide a sense of security. People would know who is within the walls. Walls can define us. They can keep others out. Zechariah ‘s vision from God is that the walls are no longer needed. God’s people have become too great and only God, not humans, defines the boundaries.

In full disclosure we came across the Zechariah passage by the back door. As our small but mighty Gifts and Gratitude Committee in thinking about the theme for this unusual year decided to embrace our current situation as we strive to be a church in every means even when we cannot come into the walls of this building. We are not without walls. We have them here but the church is so much more than that and so we are beyond these walls. We are not going down the political rabbit hole about walls but we wanted to express the reality of our situation. We cannot meet and keep everyone safe. We cannot sing and be assured that no one will get sick. And so, we need to claim who we are at this moment and time. And like all the prophets we need to proclaim God's faithfulness even when our own faithfulness may waver.

What is unique from every other crisis that we have faced is that the entire world is also facing it. All experiencing a virus that does not discriminate between the mighty and low. The virus does not care if we are tired of being a part, it is still out there ready to strike. We are a world in need a vision. We need a vision of what can be possible given the circumstances that we have. When the storms come, the fires rage the virus spirals out of control. We need the good word to help us navigate the shifting sands of uncertainty. Zechariah can you do it? Can you help us in 2020 where gathering is not safe where we wake up each morning grateful, grateful that we feel ok?

We need a vision that helps us through an election that pits families against each other. We need a vision to see us through the job losses and employment uncertainty. We need a vision that moves us beyond our own self-aggrandizement thinking that we are the creators of our own destiny. We are people who are in desperate need of a vision.

Zechariah, we are like the surveyor who is carefully measuring our own place in this world and if we keep to that we will be fine. But the angels

in Zechariah's vision says stop, no! This is not about the structures we build and create. God will move us beyond our own self-built confines. God will move us beyond ourselves.

For this year and into the next, Oak Grove's vision is beyond brick and dry wall that makes us feel loved and secure and apart of God's faithful people. We have always known that but now we go from knowing it to living it. We are a people of faith who are unleashed. Our faith does not reside on Old Shakopee Road. Our faith is now expressed beyond our own walls. We need to draw upon our creativity, our unconventionality and all the energy and will that we can muster. To continue to be the church that drew us together in the first place, we cannot assume that the church be here only when we need it.

Surely one thing that we have learned in the last seven months is that we cannot take anything for granted.

So, let me share with you some of the things that Oak Grove has been doing in the last seven months. Let me share how we have been the church beyond the walls. We have held 32 virtual services complete with music and message. 32 times that people have worked the sounds board and the video so that hundreds of people can tune in each week. 32 times musicians, singers, liturgists have agreed to come and share the service with you. We have given out DVD Players and DVD's to the service to anyone who cannot reach us online. We copy about 16 DVD's each week. We send out 43 packets with the bulletin and sermon to our home bound each week. In lieu of our Golden Harvest dinner, we delivered over 100 gift bags to our members over 80 and to our one-to-one folks last week. In our Golden harvest. We have sung happy birthday each week and held drive throughs, drive-ins car sings, bonfires, car parades and all kinds of ways to connect and stay connected because we want to be together.

Our deacons write letters to all who are on our prayer list. We have had four baptisms with two more coming next week! We have had eleven members who have joined the church triumphant and have held six poignant memorial services. We have confirmed five students and celebrated graduations of four high schoolers. We HAVE recently welcomed nine new members, all held virtually. We have a new rain garden to help with runoff from Penn and Old Shakopee and had the foundation poured for our Columbarium. We have created a Racial Equity task group and the Session is talking about Restorative justice. I could go on and on.

But the **biggest** way we are living out Zechariah's vision of beyond our walls is with our mission. When it is tempting to turn inward and to take care of our own., Oak Grove has stretched outward. Our mission giving within the budget is 25%. 25cents of every dollar you give goes to things beyond our walls. That 25 cents of each dollar goes to feed the hungry, scholarships for students in Central America and housing subsidies. Things that make a difference in lives. But that is not all our outward reach. About 15 years ago money was left to Oak Grove and it was decided rather than going into the endowment it would be used for special project and big dreams. Through good and faithful management, the money was thought to last 10 years. In its 15<sup>th</sup> year it has gone to fund the Columbarium, which has been a long dream of some members here. It has gone to help fund a new van for Oasis, the organization started by Oak Grove 10 years ago as an outreach to homeless youth. And a large grant went to Liberty Church, our sister Presbyterian church North side of Minneapolis for their outreach program. Oak Grove has been and will continue to be faithful in following Christ's mandate to feed the hungry, clothe the poor and lift up the down trodden. We are following Christ within and beyond these walls we call church. We will

do anything else God calls us to do! We have a vision. And that vision is being realized now more than ever.

Today as we dedicate our gifts for yet another year of being church together. As I ask you to pledge and make your commitment for 2021 to be part of the vision. God only knows what we are headed into! As you make your commitment, whatever large or small, know that you are being part of a group who try as best they can to follow Christ's teaching in a world that is confusing and filled with tumultuous change. But know that here at Oak Grove, as long as we can, we will be faithful to the vision that God moves us beyond these walls and into the world. Thanks be to God. Amen and Amen!