

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title: Be Thou My Vision: Following God's Leading in Uncertain Times**

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### **Scripture:**

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#### **John 20:19-21**

<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

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### **Transcript:**

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Holy Spirit, as we turn to your word, help us hear from you and be changed by you. In your name, amen.

Well, great to have all of you here and those of you who are joining us online, thanks for being here on Sunday morning. Start with a question. Of all the things that Jesus could have left behind, like a university, a government, a charity, why on earth would he leave behind a church to carry his message to the whole world? Especially since churches are often so messed up? It just seems like a bad idea, right? You do not want God as your HR director because he hires all the wrong people. And I think for a lot of folks, the word church has this negative connotations. Recently, someone asked me, "Why do you leave the sanctuary service?" You know, because I preach over there and then I come over here and he said, "Why do you leave the sanctuary service when you're finished preaching? Are you tired and need to rest?" Yeah. Right. I'm taking a nap in the back. But for a lot of folks, that's their image of church. Like absent. Taking a nap. At best, irrelevant. At worse, a negative force.

So what is the purpose of the church? We're doing a sermon series called, Be Thou My Vision, about how God guides us as individuals and collectively as a church, through really uncertain times. And last week we talked about how one of the ways we get courage is to look back at the ways that God has guided us in the past. That's how we get courage in uncertain times. How has God guided us before, both as individuals and as a church? And we showed you a video of some of the ways God has used this church, for the past 67 years, to make a difference all around the world.

And so today I want to talk about where God is leading us into the future as a church, to extend what he's already been doing in our past. And how being part of that, brings us more meaning, courage, purpose, hope, and joy.

And we see that today's scripture, which is from John 20. Jesus has been raised from the dead after being crucified, and he's meeting with his disciples and he's essentially starting the church and telling them what they're supposed to do. And it says, "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the religious leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, 'Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, I am sending you.'" And the capitalized words there, the words I've capitalized, give us kind of a clue what Jesus intends the church, not just us, but any church to be.

Starting with the last capitalized word, send. As the Father sent me, I am sending you. We are a sent people. Sent to help other people know Jesus. The number of Christians in America is in free fall. Every year, 7,000 churches close, not going the right direction. Folks are not going to come to us. We have to go to them. So, we are sent. Sent to do what? Well, that's the other capitalized words.

The text says the disciples feared the religious leaders. Fear. Is there any fear in our world today? Is there any fear in your life? No. Josh says, "No," but the rest of you, fear about jobs. Fear about the economy. Fear about grades. Fear about social standing and position. Fear, fear, fear, fear. But look what Jesus does. He showed them the wounds on his hand and side, that he got when he was crucified, because what he's saying is, "Look, it's me. I was dead, but now I'm alive." Which means if we know Jesus, we don't even have to fear death because we'll just rise again like he did. And even when something terrible happens, God will just use it for good the way he used Jesus crucifixion, to pay the price for our sins.

In a fearful world, we, his disciples, are sent to bring the courage that Jesus gives us and his love. Because by showing them his hands, he's also saying, "See how much I love you. I love you so much, I'd rather die than lose you, so I did." We are sent to bring Jesus courage and to help people experience his love.

And then another word Jesus uses here, uses it twice, actually. Peace, which in the Bible does not mean absence of conflict, or calm, or serenity. The biblical word for peace is Shalom and it means total flourishing. Flourishing in every dimension. It means social, relational, spiritual, economic flourishing. That's what that word peace means biblically. Jesus sends his disciples to bring total flourishing in our world, an end to racial injustice, an end to loneliness. Help the poor thrive. Help people know Jesus.

And when we do that, that brings the last word. Joy. The disciples were overjoyed. That's the church. The church is not an institution. It's not a political lobbying organization. The church is not a vehicle for potlucks, though those are good.

The church is a community of people who are being transformed by Jesus and are sent to bring Jesus' love, courage, flourishing and joy, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls that the kingdom of God. Does our world need the kingdom of God?

Yes.

Thank you. Some of you are awake. Does our world need courage and joy and total flourishing? Yes. Rates of suicide and depression are skyrocketing, particularly among youth. Poverty, addiction, marriages are struggling and people don't know that God loves them enough to die for them and are headed for a godless eternity, if we don't tell them about Jesus. So, our mission is what it's always been. Our mission is to participate with Jesus in furthering the kingdom of God on the east side and the places in the world God sends us. And the kingdom of God is when things are happening the way God wants them to happen. When there is total flourishing. When the poor are being brought out of poverty. When people are discovering Jesus. When people are experiencing courage, hope, meaning, purpose, and joy. When divisions are being erased. That's our mission. And not just us. We do this with other churches. It's not just us, but it's our mission and it never changes. Our mission never changes.

But how we do that mission, from time to time, season to season, does change sometimes. So starting in January, our elders and pastors, we started meeting and talking. We prayed. We fasted. We discerned. Where is God taking us in the next couple of years? And we have discerned, through all that prayer and fasting, that over the next three to five years, God is leading us to partner with Jesus in bringing his kingdom in three specific ways.

First, by equipping our whole congregation to be fully engaged disciples. There is a difference between going to church and being a disciple. Going to church is good. That's good but there's more. More courage, more hope, more meaning, more purpose in being a disciple. And a disciple is not someone who just goes to church. That too, that's good. A disciple is someone who's becoming like Jesus.

And last spring, we did a whole sermon series on six different characteristics of disciple. Disciples are marked by Jesus love. Equipped and eager to share the good news of Jesus. They are healers of injustice, who live sacrificially, and are connected to a multicultural, multi-generational community. And obey Jesus is Lord, through prayer scripture.

Now, lots of details, how we're going to do this for all of us and we'll talk more about that on Vision Night, September 26th. But for now, I'm going to give you a promise. I'm going to give you a promise. If you are part of any group here at BelPres, if you are in an All In group, if you serve in our parking lot team, if you are a greeter, if you are on our accordion polka committee. Some of you are like, "Hey, they have one of those." No, of course we don't. That would be stupid.

If you're part of anything here at BelPres, you won't just... Someone plays the accordion here. I'm so sorry. If you are part of any group here at BelPres, you won't just be part of that group though, that in itself is a good thing. We will also help you grow as a disciple and develop these six characteristics because our mission is to participate in the supernatural work of Jesus, of bringing his kingdom and churchgoers won't get that done. Just going to church won't get that done. But disciples will. Churchgoers don't change the world, but disciples do. And just going to church will not give us the fullness of the hope and courage and joy that Jesus wants to give. But when we're disciples, we experience more of that. We're going, to make us all, disciples.

Second focus is to empower every generation to reach young families. Now, that does not mean... That does not mean if you're not a young family, if you're single, or you're younger or you're older, that does not mean that there's nothing here for you. That's not what that means. But we feel called to pay special attention to young families because the east side is experiencing growth in ways that most cities aren't right now and a lot demographic data shows, a lot, a lot, a lot of the people moving here are diverse young families from all over the world.

This church was planted 67 years ago to reach the people on the east side and 67 years ago, a lot of those folks were young families and that's true today. That's our mission field. That's what we're here to reach. So we want to give special attention to them.

And families are under pressure in ways they never have been before. More families are single parent families in a culture that's built for two parent families. The amount of time kids have to spend in sports has exploded over the last 30 years, which is making families busier than ever. And getting into college is harder than it's ever been and one of the ways you get into college is to have things on your resume like sports, so you almost kind of have to do it.

Financially, both parents usually have to work just to make ends meet, and families are flying apart because of the pressure. We are called to be an all generations church that brings Jesus courage and hope to these families. And as we do that, that helps all of us become disciples.

My entire Christian life, I have always had people who are older than me, mentoring me, and discipling me, and guiding me. And I have always had people who are younger than me, that I am mentoring and discipling and guiding and those younger people are discipling me right back.

If you're younger or single, you can be the big brother, the big sister, the stand-in aunt or uncle that the kids in these young families need. You can do that even by just saying, "Hello," to them in the lobby or praying for them and it is so rewarding to be part of younger people's lives. Those of you who are older, you have wisdom and life lessons that young families not only need, they want from you. They want that wisdom from you.

I was talking to a pastor a while back and his church is mostly people in their twenties and thirties, almost exclusively people in their twenties and thirties. And he says that if anyone ever shows up at that church, that's over 50. He says, all the people just flock to that person because they just want to be around older people. So then he asked me, he said, "So could you come to my church and preach and just hang out once in a while to just be old in our presence?" I can do that for you. I can be old for you. Check that box because they want to be there.

And those of you who are older, you need these younger families, to pass on your wisdom to so that it doesn't go to waste and to be in relationship with younger people who kind of help keep you young and can fix your computer and all of those things.

A few months ago, we gave Bibles to our first graders and the next day a couple sent this picture to us of their six year old son, leaning over his new Bible, pouring over. He wanted to take it to school the next day to show his friends. That. We want lots and lots and lots of that because this is how the faith gets passed down generation to generation and this family and this little boy needs all of us, all us, to keep this fire for Jesus, his whole life. All of us.

When we baptize kids here, collectively we make a promise that we're going to be there for these kids. We're going to keep that promise. We're going to be that church.

In the next three to five years, we will equip our entire congregation to be fully engaged disciples, empower every generation to reach young families, and then finally we will further develop our campus to serve the needs of our church family and the east side, starting with this room, which is inadequate. And we know it. It doesn't feel like a worship space. The acoustics in here are just bad and make everything sound weird, so we got to fix that. But, we have a history here of using our campus to bless the community around us. That's why this gym is open to the community. That's why the farmer's market is in our parking lot. So, we want to figure out

ways to continue to do that and extend that because Jesus sends us to bring his kingdom, we will focus on these three areas for the next three to five years. Lots of details. How we're going to do that. We'll talk about that, Vision Night, on September 26th.

But for now, action step for you is just simply ask Jesus, "Where are you leading me to be part of this?" Maybe it's to be in an All In group so that you can grow as a disciple. Maybe it's to be part of our kids or students' ministries, because nothing changes your life like discipling someone who's younger.

Some of our All In groups may say, "You know what? There's six or eight of us in this group. Collectively, we're going to do the second grade Sunday school, all year long." And so each person won't be there every week but throughout the year they'll get the same rotation of people because our All In group, we're going to own the second grade Sunday school.

Maybe for you it's to go on a global mission trip, or be sent to your workplace or retirement community, or coach soccer, but do it in a way that brings Jesus kingdom and we're going to support you in that. Maybe it's to pray, or to write notes of encouragement to people who need encouraging.

And if you're looking at this and you're feeling uneasy about this, or you're like, "Oh, I don't know." You're not feeling like, "I don't..." Pray about that. You don't feel like I don't know where my place is. Pray about that. If you're looking at this and you think, "I don't like this." Really pray about that because Jesus is going to make you like it. I'm sure of it.

And the reason we do this is because our mission is to participate in the supernatural work of Jesus, to bring his kingdom here on earth, to make this earth look more like his heaven, to bring racial justice, to bring loneliness to an end, to bring people to Jesus, to create community that changes the world.

The Bible says, "Christ himself gave us the apostles, the prophets, the pastors." This is an interesting verse. Why did Jesus make pastors? Why did he give us pastors after all? That's a good question. To do what? To equip his people for the work of ministry. We have had it wrong for decades. The American church. Pastor's job is not to do the work of ministry. That's the way we've been doing. That's not the pastor's job. Pastor's job is not to do the work of ministry. The pastor's job is to equip you all to do the work of ministry. That's what the Bible says and we've had it backwards.

And the promise is that when we do that, all of us, we all, the verse continues, "Become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there." In other words, when we all participate in the work of Jesus, we become mature disciples. We become like Jesus and then we are more

stable in our lives and not being tossed back and forth by every worry, by every fear. "Oh, my grades." "Oh, my 401k." "Oh, my job." "I'm so afraid." We don't get tossed back and forth as much anymore when we become like Jesus. And we do that as we partner with him, to bring his kingdom.

There's a strong connection between purpose and joy. There's a strong connection between purpose and joy. You are made to participate with Jesus in bringing his kingdom and when we do that, it brings purpose, which brings joy, because God doesn't use us to get ministry done. He uses ministry to get us done. This isn't about just getting volunteers for our church. It's not about that at all. We have robbed people of the opportunity, to be transformed, by being part of what Jesus is doing in our church and in our world.

This is how we change lives. This is how we experience more of Jesus meaning, purpose, and joy, when we participate in the work of ministry. One of, if not the most explosive period of spiritual growth in my life, came after I had finished seminary. No seminary was not an explosive period of spiritual growth. It came after that and I switched careers to get a PhD in literature at Stanford to be a professor. And then one summer, I came up here for the summer to be adjunct at SPU and I got invited to a party and I met a recent Stanford grad and when he found out that I was at Stanford, he said, "Oh, oh, oh. There's a college ministry there, connected to a church Menlo Church, and they're looking for volunteers to lead a Bible study for college students." And I said, "Oh, I go to that church," which was a generous description of my church going habits back then. Was more like I dropped in quarterly. So I was a church goer. But when I got back in the fall, I volunteered to lead a Bible study of college guys and leading that group made my faith grow. They'd ask questions I didn't know the answer to, even though I'd been to seminary, and I had to search scripture to figure it out. They entrusted me with their deepest secrets, fears and shame. And I felt the Holy Spirit moved through me to bring healing for them in that. I did not change their life. God changed their life but I got to be part of the supernatural work that God was doing.

And then the college pastor started to notice I had some gifts for ministry and so then she decided she started saying things to me like, "You are in direct defiance of the sovereign will of the all holy God, not being a pastor."

Wow. How do you feel about that? Then a few years later she left and the church asked if I'd be the college pastor and I said, "No." And then they asked again. I said, "Okay. I'll do it for one year." I did it for five. And as I did that, an older couple came into my life and they taught me how to pray. I mean really pray and really listen to God. I started meeting every week with a man in his eighties, World War II vet, and he disciplined me and mentored me, which as a young dad and a young husband and a young family, I needed his wisdom and he gave it to me.

I learned things for my college students about how to follow Jesus, all of which prepared me to come here. All of that spiritual growth, because I went to a party where someone encouraged me to start doing the work of ministry. I go to one party and poof, I'm a pastor. But I am so

grateful because it's a bigger life. In spite of all my sins, flaws and failures, and they are many, I've been able to participate in the supernatural work of Jesus, to bring his kingdom and it is so deeply rewarding.

And many of you know this because you are participating as well, in the work of ministry, in our church, or where you live, or in your office, or in your family. God has been doing these things all along but he wants to extend it, so that everyone is part of bringing his kingdom because this is what we were made to do.

When my wife was pregnant with our first child, we got a dog. Super stupid. Bad timing. Don't do that. Right? And the dog was half Whippet and Whippets are a racing dog, so lots of energy in this dog. And then we started having kids and we got busy, got harder to give the dog chances to get all that energy out. I would take it running, but the dog didn't like the leash, so it'd turn around and bite me and all that stuff. But if the dog didn't get the energy out, it just went off. It went haywire. It went off the rails. It would chew everything. It wouldn't obey, no matter what we did. It wrecked the furniture and we try to get the energy out, but the dog didn't like to run.

So then instead, I figured out something else to do. Every couple of days, I took the dog's favorite chew toy and I would hold it up above my head and the dog would just jump and jump and jump, trying to get the toy and it loved it. The dog just loved that. Right? I'd pick up the toy and the dog, "Do I get to jump now?" It was very handy actually, because I just had to hold it like this and I'd be like talking on the phone and the dog would jump and jump and jump and I'd read a book and the dog would jump and jump and jump. Finally, it would get tired and then settle down and I'd give it the toy and it would be fine for a couple of days.

The dog did not have an obedience problem. The dog had a purpose problem. It was made to race and when it didn't race, it went off the rails and started chewing the furniture. Didn't have an obedience problem. It had a purpose problem. We were made to partner with Jesus to bring his kingdom and if we aren't doing that, we have a purpose problem and we'll start chewing the furniture, metaphorically speaking.

God invites us into so much more. There is nothing so dangerous to the devil's plans as a church, fully yielded to Jesus Christ, which is why BelPres. I see beautiful things ahead. I see a church filled with disciples who are becoming like Jesus and experiencing more of his courage, hope, meaning, purpose and joy. I see thousands of people who do not know that the God of the universe, love them enough to die for them, finding a life changing relationship with Jesus. I see a truly multi-cultural, multi-generational community, loving each other across their differences, a thing so rare, that people will flock to Jesus, the Jesus who makes it possible. I see a church where families are thriving and showing other stressed out families, that it is possible you can flourish through Jesus. I see the chains of poverty and addiction and loneliness



and racism falling off of people because how we, as well as other churches, participate in a liberating work of Christ.

An anxious world needs a confident church. A fearful world needs a courageous church. A divided world needs a united church. And a hopeless world needs a church filled with disciples who bring the hope that only Jesus can bring to our world. And with God's help, we will become that church to carry his love and his healing, wherever we live, work, play or learn, until the earth is filled with the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea.

So Jesus, thank you. Thank you that you give us this amazing invitation. You could have done it without us, but you have chosen to do it with us. So Lord, to help us to be your disciples, who carry your hope and healing, wherever we go, so the world will know that you are Lord. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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### **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- God doesn't use us just to get ministry done, he uses ministry to get us done. How has serving in ministry either inside or outside the church helped you grow as a Disciple?
- How do you think God might want to help you grow as a disciple through serving in the future?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.