Seeing Jesus’ Vision for Transformation

First in a new series: Doing Our Part to Change the World

# Scripture: Matt. 9:35-38; Isa. 58:6-12

# Key thought: Jesus’ vision is that the church will change the world.

# Intro:

The news today is often so filled with bad news that we are taken aback. Two bad hurricane strikes in the US. Two terrible hurricanes in the Caribbean. Two quakes and a hurricane in Mexico. Wildfires in the American west. There is so much tragedy and loss. The groaning of creation described by St. Paul has never been more evident.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Rom 8:22

But that is not the only kind of brokenness that confronts us in our world. We constantly see moral brokenness. Newspapers chronicle arrests for terrible things like murder and fraud against charities and even sexual abuse of children and modern slavery of young people for the sex trade. These things rightfully shock us.

But to the discerning, there is also the deeper brokenness. We see the deep-seated brokenness when we look at unending international conflicts, repeated stories of racial prejudices, and evidences of inequalities stemming from systemic injustices.

When we are confronted by all this, we can have a several different reactions.

1. We can turn away and actually focus more on ourselves. Maybe it’s a sort of pulling into our shell to avoid emotional engagement. Maybe it’s a fatalistic attitude, “If the world is going to hell, I might as well have fun while I can.” It’s not a very mature reaction perhaps, but it’s too descriptive of many people’s actual behavior.
2. We can feel helpless and totally overcome by the magnitude of the need, the horror of the brokenness. This might even lead to depression. But, unfortunately, if all we do is be horrified, it will not result in action, only in despair. The sadness may even turn to anger, but if our anger does not find a good outlet, if it is not turned into positive motivation, we will not really be able to be a part of the solution either. We will just lash out or act out, or even become further depressed.
3. We can look at Jesus and seek to do something to bring healing to the brokenness of our world one step at a time. That’s what this series of messages will be about. Jesus had a vision for bringing healing to brokenness. Think of the incident where Jesus read from the scroll at the synagogue.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me   
to proclaim good news to the poor.   
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4:16-21 NIV

That was a quote from Isaiah that Jesus adopted as a life mission. What was the vision that God gave to the prophet Isaiah about who the people of God would be?

Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins  
 and will raise up the age-old foundations;  
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,  
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. Isa 58:12 NIV

That sounds like a vison for the transformation of a broken world to me! It sounds like God wants his people to make a huge difference in the hurting world in which they find themselves.

Recall also that Jesus told his assembled disciples after his resurrection,

“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” John 20:21

On another occasion he had said to his disciples…

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. John 14:12 NRSV

So it is clear that Jesus had a vision that his followers would make a huge difference in the world. And they have! Not just in the sense of winning other people to be disciples of Jesus but by changing the situations of people around them, in bringing healing to our collective brokenness. Examples abound. In nearly every city in the US and in most countries where missionaries have gone, there are hospitals founded and funded by Christians. All over the US there are colleges that got their start as seminaries, training schools for pastors. It is Christian missionaries that have been the vanguard of literacy training and translation projects, inventing written languages for language groups that had no written language. Whenever there is a disaster such as happened in Texas, it is ultimately Christian churches working together and continuing their response long after the disaster coverage has faded from the news, that accomplish the most to make a difference in the personal recovery of people.

But how do we become a personal part of Jesus’ work of transforming the world? Where do we get motivation and wisdom to act to make a difference?

# To catch Jesus' Vision we must see brokenness as He did.

The process starts in a place that surprises us. Look at the text for this morning.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Matt 9:36 NRSV

The first Greek word describing the people means to be troubled or vexed. The second one means to be tossed about, shaken up or thrown around. It sounds like a description for people after a disaster strikes doesn’t it.

What was Jesus instruction to the disciples? Jesus pointed out that the people were like sheep without shepherds. They needed Jesus as their shepherd. Then he said,

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Matt 9:37, 38 NRSV

Pray that God will send people to do something about it – to change the world! That’s you and me. But the first step was to see the need. Many people today do not see the need at all. They pull within themselves and do nothing about what they see happening to their world.

## We need to ask some hard questions?

Do we turn a deaf ear when people talk about racial prejudice or do we seek to learn and listen - to see the brokenness that causes so much pain today? Then the way is open for us to be a part of the bridge-building that is needed?

Do we hear the crises of injustice when an immigrant father who has been in the country earning a living for 15 years is threatened with permanent separation from his wife and children because his paperwork is not in order? Do we read the scripture when the Bible tells us plainly to have one law for the resident and the alien and to treat the alien kindly because we were once aliens?

Do we recognize the spiritual wasteland in the entertainment industry? If it isn’t R rated or worse it will hardly be noticed. Decent people can hardly find a TV show to watch. If you do watch TV you will see hundreds of murders, extra-marital affairs, etc.

When Jesus saw the condition of his world his response was compassion. His conclusion was – these people need a shepherd! They need someone who pours the oil of healing on their wounds, someone who guides them, and leads them to better pasture. When we look at the brokenness of our world today, our conclusion needs to be the same – compassion. These people need the help that comes through God’s people, and these people need the Good News that comes through Jesus.

# Jesus' vision for changing the world begins with a change in us.

But what is the difference between the person that Isaiah describes in the contrasting section just before what we read:

On the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. Isa 58:3-4

…and the person Jesus wants us to be that Isaiah described later?... the person who strives …

to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? … to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?   
Isa 58:6-7

The difference is a change of heart in us! The promise God gave to the Jewish people has even deeper meaning for us in the age of grace initiated by Jesus Christ.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Ezek 36:25-27

When we respond to Jesus’ call to become his followers, when we confess our own need of his grace and forgiveness, then His Holy Spirit indwells our spirit to encourage us along the right paths.

When we have had that change of heart, we then are open to our calling to be sent into the harvest fields that Jesus described “ripe for harvest” (John 4:35). We are then ready for Jesus to call us to his work of being builders and restorers, of being those who assist the oppressed and the wanderer, and helping to provide for those who have lost shelter and daily sustenance in the storms of life.

Jesus’ vision for the transformation of the world begins with the transformation of us! As Paul put it…

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Rom 12:1-2 NIV

Then we are ready to do new things to help others. Here is a quote from the Church and Society Guidelines of the Methodist Church

When John Wesley said that there is “no holiness but social holiness” he was warning the church against the practice of isolating itself from the world. There is always a danger of hiding away within the walls of the church while the world is perishing around us. Holiness calls us to be God’s witnesses in a hurting world. We cannot hide, for we live not in the isolation of our holy temples but in the world where people are hurting. The faith Jesus demonstrated is lived out in the world. It is a faith that cares about the needs of the poor, cares about the illnesses of the sick, the nakedness of the unclothed, the oppression of the enslaved, and the loneliness of the imprisoned. Biblical faith is active faith. It isn’t reserved for the purity of the holy cloister. It is a faith that rolls up its sleeves and goes into the world to make a difference. Yet, most Christians fail to make this connection. Church for most Christians is something we do on Sunday. Many create a strong divide in their minds between “church” and “society,” the sacred and the secular. Church is the pure sanctuary where we come to be holy. Society is the sinful world where we live the rest of the week. How can United Methodists become disciples transforming the world if we never bring the church and the world together?

# Jesus changes the world through individuals, families, small groups, and churches

When we have allowed Jesus’ transforming Spirit to be at work in us through the lifelong process of discipleship, then how does Jesus plan to bring transformation? How does his plan work?

Jesus’ plan for changing the world works through individuals but also through the small units of society that he has established—the family, small teams of disciples, and the church as a whole.

## Family

Friends, as our own hearts are transformed, then because we are changed, the family is transformed as well. We learn how to love from Jesus. We learn his vision of faithfulness to covenant. We learn from his example of self-sacrifice for those we love.

In our country today we are seeing greater and greater disparity between God’s vision for family and what is happening. Fewer and fewer children are raised by both biological parents, even though we know from studies that this is by far the most beneficial path for the children. We need a return to families changed from the inside by God.

When the family is transformed by the love and power of God, better things happen everywhere. And society as a whole benefits greatly from that family strength.

## Small teams

Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-two. Small teams of Christian workers are a powerful way that God gets his work done. The women’s ministry in our own church is such a team. A group of two or three prayer partners or a small study group can be such a team as well. One of the great things for a Bible study to do is to take on a service project together. It will add a whole deeper dimension to your group. And your earlier friendship and kinship in Bible study together will result in strong teamwork on the project that you choose as well. The world will be different because if you!

## The church as a whole

God uses the witness and influence of the church as a whole to be salt and light in society.

The United Methodist Church has sought to catch Jesus’ vison to make a difference. Our mission as a whole church is to “make disciples for the transformation of the world.” How is that for a big vision statement?

The church as a whole can make a huge difference. Not only do we keep the story of Jesus and his love alive, we also influence our world by living and loving as Jesus taught and by valuing attitudes and actions and things the way he taught us. This is part of how we make a difference.

Some projects take nearly the whole church to do. The whole United Methodist Church worked together to raise funds toward the elimination of malaria. As a whole we raised millions of dollars and made a big difference. Who knows how many lives may have been saved. I read in the news that a new strain of the malaria parasite that is resistant to current drugs has emerged in Southeast Asia. But because of our working together, millions to mosquito nets may be in place to help prevent infections.

# Conclusion

A few years ago the country of Sierra Leone in West Africa was recovering from a bitter civil war. A professor from Houghton College was on a trip there and noticed that there were many native grown mangoes rotting on the ground, unused. There was also a great need to provide a way for local people to make a living.

The professor got the idea that a practical way to help the people in need would be to develop a way to market those rotting mangoes. So he started a series of trips with a student team who, in partnership with World Hope International, developed the Mango project. Some of those original students are now in charge.

Here is how that original practical response has grown. This is from a current webpage of World Hope.

The Outgrowers Project in Sierra Leone develops commercially driven supply chains for the country’s abundance of wild mangos that would regularly rot due to a lack of demand.  The project is expanding to include other staple cash-crops, most notably the piloting of pineapple cultivation in existing cooperatives.  The Outgrowers Project targets smallholder farms with the goal of developing sustainable, culturally relevant agribusiness enterprises at the village level.  Participating farmers are organized into village cooperatives so they can work more effectively with one another.  Each cooperative is able to set the terms of their supply agreement to ensure standard, fair pricing upon delivery and is linked directly to an international juice processing company as a supplier.  Drop-off stations are set up and a pick-up schedule is distributed to each cooperative so that each farmer can plan their harvest in advance.  (World Hope website)

Let’s apply the message steps to this example.

A professor sees the brokenness of the situation. He has courage and wisdom to take action.

He recruits a small team of Christian students – people whose lives God has already changed.

Then with support from Houghton College, a Christian College and from a parachurch relief charity called World Hope Int. which is an arm of the greater church and is supported by it, this small team is making a huge difference in changing the brokenness of poverty in a third world country that was emerging from war.

The question for us is whether we will choose to be part of what Jesus is doing - to see the world as he sees it, to allow his Spirit to change us, and then step by step, to do our part to change the world.