

**Investing in God's Vision**  
**November 13, 2022**  
**Isaiah 65:17-25**  
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**Grand Rapids MI**

Earlier this year my sister Catherine and her husband Dave took the big step of finally renovating their kitchen. Now if you have ever renovated a kitchen, you know how big and disruptive such a job brings. She was using hotplates, microwaves crockpots to cook for several months while the whole kitchen was being taken apart. Catherine really enjoyed tearing down the wall between the kitchen and dining room that had been a wish of hers for most of the thirty years they had lived in this house.

You see, Catherine's family has been growing and as with most families, everyone gathers in the kitchen as dinner is being prepared. This new floor plan would allow people to spill over into the dining room or sit around the new island they were putting in and feel like they were in the kitchen without crowding the cook. How many can relate to this important need. Sometimes you need to open things up to make sure others are included in the festivities.

Over time we tend to realize that our changing lifestyles require a reworking of the spaces we inhabit. Maybe you want to add a bigger deck, or you want to convert a room from a bedroom into a den or office. Or as we did at my house, we needed more space to entertain outside, because we are making friends here. I discovered this summer that Amy and Laura do make friends and enjoy having people over. So, we worked on improving our back yard space so we can entertain out there even as it gets colder out.

Now little changes are helpful, but bigger plans take time, planning and resources. It's not like you can make the plans, go to sleep and the next day the new kitchen is in and

ready to be used again. It takes some deconstructing and rebuilding; it takes planning and being willing to do things differently and look differently. It is the vision, the dreams of what it will be like once it's finished that keeps you on task. It's an investment into the future. The vision of how much better life can be is what we are seeing in Isaiah's reading today. God is casting the vision of how great it will be, inviting us to embrace the vision of a new heaven and a new earth. The commitment starts with us letting go of the old memories and imagining a better world. God's final goal is summed up in that final verse:

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together.

The lion shall eat straw like the ox,  
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
says the Lord.

As the people of Judah were returning to Jerusalem from their years of exile they were facing the big challenge of rebuilding their community. But this return also gave them an opportunity to rethink their values and correct their mistakes that cast them into exile in the first place. The generation before them had allowed a false religion to creep in that exalted personal gain and exploitation rather than the community-centered faith of their ancestors. Remember, God had promised Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:2). This prophetic word was reminding them of the blessings of God to all who are faithful.

This prophecy was an invitation to the people to share in this vision. To be encouraged to do the hard work of rebuilding the community by reminding them of the reward in the end. Like when we do a big renovation, and you must cook your food on a hotplate and

eat dinners in the basement for a time. Renovation time and is a big inconvenience, but the dream of having thanksgiving with all your loved ones hanging out in the new kitchen keeps you motivated.

When we look at the things that God is promising we see it is all for the community. For Judah they shared in the dream that babies would no longer die from malnutrition or disease. They could imagine adults would live a long and healthy life because a happy heart is a healthy heart. The fear of being exploited would be gone because they were invested in the prosperity of the community and seeking the common good of all. Through that shared value of seeking the common good the community is more secure, because you are invested in one another's' prosperity. There are no winners and losers, we all win together.

Hold onto the vision, because taking down those walls, those barriers between us takes time and can create a lot of dust in the meantime. Reorienting our minds from "everyone out for themselves." to "everyone does better when we all do better." Takes time and commitment to the dream.

The vision itself would bring people together because you want everyone's input and vision for a better life together. One of the blessings of rebuilding or remodeling is the opportunity to imagine a better way of being. To consider the present needs of today and make the changes necessary to address those needs. You can make it more kid friendly or more accessible for the older bodied people who maybe need to sit down, for example.

We, as a church, are also in a type of rebuilding phase of our ministry. East Church has always been a community-oriented church but the needs of the community around us keep changing. A few decades ago, we realized that we needed to be more

accessibility-minded and we invested in adding an elevator that allows us to access most of our building and we put in the Loop system to help people participate better. When COVID hit we realized that we needed to upgrade our technology so we could continue to meet the spiritual needs of the community, especially for those who were not able to come to church. Now most of the community has relaxed our precautions regarding COVID, but there is still a segment of the community that are remaining cautious for good reason. We need to keep them in mind when we envision our own renovations as a community of faith.

Part of the work right now is to name clearly what changes we do want to make. We want to reclaim our identity as a community church and work on including as many voices as possible to envision what that will look like in the future.

Any good project takes a few things. First is a budget and a big part of that budget is our pledges. Our commitment to investing in this faith community. The second thing we need is a vision. What do we want to accomplish in the end, what needs are we trying to address and what do we envision in the end. Then we need a plan to reach that dream.

So, to help us with the visioning part of this plan I encourage all of you, especially those watching online. Tell me one dream idea you have on how we can care for the community better. The second thing is name something that we need to change. Name a barrier that you see is inhibiting our ability to be a better community church. Think of this as your wish list. Write it down and send it to me. We have a Futuring team working to engage the church to work on a plan of action and this input is vital to their work. In the coming months we will be seeking more opportunities to bring us together and hear from each other directly so stay tuned.