



**A SIX-WEEK SERIES
ON THE VISION OF CEDAR RIDGE COMMUNITY CHURCH**

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

SEPTEMBER 8 – OCTOBER 13, 2024

Week 1: Our Vision

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. Our mission (purpose) is to be a community of hope and transformation dedicated to following Jesus. Share how hopeful or not you feel for yourself and for the world. What kind of transformation do you want to see in yourself and in the world?
3. Read Matthew 3:10-13 and Matthew 4:12-17. How are John the Baptist's and Jesus' words similar and how are they different? In what ways are they hopeful? In what ways do they cause discomfort?
4. Read our vision statement (see below). In what ways does this inspire you? In what ways does it make you feel uncomfortable? What are some new ways in which you feel challenged to respond to this vision of the future?
5. Our vision is to be a community "where everyone belongs." Share about your own sense of belonging and any current barriers you experience. What are some ways we could all contribute as a community to a greater sense of belonging for others?
6. Read the passage below from Matthew 10:5-8 (The Message)

Jesus sent his twelve harvest hands out with this charge: "Don't begin by traveling to some far-off place to convert unbelievers. And don't try to be dramatic by tackling some public enemy. Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons. You have been treated generously, so live generously.

What do you think being "sent" in this passage looks like in our time and space? A more literal translation of "You have been treated generously, so live generously" is "Freely you have received; freely give." In what ways do you think you need to receive more and in what ways do you think you need to give more? Is this giving and receiving in balance in your life as a follower of Jesus? How might you restore any imbalance?

Practice for the week: Be the Change

In the message this week we reflected on several personal challenges for us all to make our vision a reality in our world:

- Nurture belonging
- Live as an agent of love, peace, and hope
- Let your life speak
- Embrace discomfort

Take some time this week to reflect on how you could personally respond to these challenges. Consider the following and then prayerfully write down some action steps that you can commit to:

- What do you need to do?
- What is holding you back?
- How could you overcome this resistance?
- To whom do you need to reach out for support and encouragement?

Our Vision

Imagine a community that dares to dream of heaven on Earth; a diverse community where everyone is welcomed and respected and their journey cherished; a community where everyone belongs and looks out for the concerns of others, so no one feels alone.

Imagine a community of peace and safety where it's possible to shelter from the frenzied pace of life in order to slow down and explore the mystery and meaning of our existence; where we can take time to address the roots of our anxieties and pain; a place of hope where we can find help and healing and the power to change, no matter how desperate our situation.

Imagine a community of people devoted to following Jesus together, learning to live like him and helping one another grow in their relationship with God; where we are gradually transformed to become better people who enjoy life to the full and who can also deal with adversity well, learning to grow through failure and suffering.

Imagine that community scattered throughout the region working as agents of love, peace, and hope wherever they are; serving our neighbors and pursuing justice with the oppressed and underserved.

Imagine a community of people who live simply and ethically, who share their land and resources with their neighbors; a community that treasures the Earth and reaches out beyond national, cultural, and political barriers to offer friendship and practical support.

Imagine a community of people who make the world a better place.

Week 2: A Vision for Transformation

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. Read Matthew 4:17. In the message on Sunday, we considered three (of many) ways in which our hearts and minds can be opened to Jesus' "kingdom of heaven consciousness" (a consciousness "from beyond"):
 - Contemplation
 - Community
 - Adversity

Have any of these been helpful in experiencing transformation in your own life? Which of them has been most helpful for you? Which one(s) do you feel challenged to engage with more? What are other ways you have experienced a transformation of consciousness or fresh awareness?

3. Read Romans 12:1-2. How would you describe some of the "patterns of this world" that have potentially transformative influence on us? To what degree do you feel you might have adapted to any of these personally?
4. Read Matthew 11:28-30 in The Message version of the bible. In what ways do you feel "tired or burned out"? What do you feel is at the root of this and how might the passage help you in this regard?
5. Some people describe the above passage as Jesus inviting us to become his apprentices. What does apprenticeship in the way of Jesus mean to you personally? What could "unforced rhythms of grace" look like for you? What do you need to do to engage more fully in this?
6. If it feels more appropriate, feel free to break into groups of 2 or 3 for this question. Read Galatians 5:22-23 and share which of these human qualities ("fruits of the spirit") feels like your greatest challenge right now. In the message on Sunday, we reflected on some of the components of a process of transformation. This is not a linear list, nor is it definite or exhaustive, but share about which of them could be most helpful to you right now in your own journey of transformation: love, honesty, letting go, practice, asking for help, time.

After discussing this, spend some time praying with and for one another.

Practice for the week: Walking the path of transformation

This week take some more time personally to reflect on the last question above. In quietness open your heart to God and allow God's love and acceptance to permeate you. Let go of any feelings of failure or self-rejection. Remind yourself that you are on a journey, and that journey is not over yet, so you have all kinds of transformative opportunities and possibilities ahead of you.

Then, in the same posture of openness, reflect on the areas of your life where you feel you most need to change. Just be honest with yourself in this atmosphere of God's love. What kind of person do you long to be? Where do you most need Jesus' help?

With Sunday's message and your group discussion in mind, now reflect on how you could strengthen your apprenticeship to Jesus. What new "unforced rhythms of grace" do you need to pursue? What lapsed ones do you need to revive? Reflect on the components of transformation again (love, honesty, letting go, practice, asking for help, time) and determine which of these (or others) are ones you especially need to engage with.

After this reflection take a moment to outline the actions steps you are going to take. It might help to write this down in a journal or share it with a trusted friend.

Week 3: A Vision for Justice

1. What seemed relevant or timely to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that made you uncomfortable or with which you disagreed?
2. What emotions does the word “justice” convey to you? Why do you feel like this? Share a little of your own story with regards to justice issues.
3. Maya Angelou said, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” What have you learned recently that you think can help you “do better”?
4. Read the excerpt from our vision statement below. In what ways does this inspire you? In what ways does it make you feel uncomfortable or challenging?

Imagine that community scattered throughout the region working as agents of love, peace, and hope wherever they are; serving our neighbors and pursuing justice with the oppressed and underserved. Imagine a community of people who live simply and ethically, who share their land and resources with their neighbors; a community that treasures the Earth and reaches out beyond national, cultural, and political barriers to offer friendship and practical support. Imagine a community of people who make the world a better place.

5. Read Luke 4:16-21. Jesus is reading from Isaiah 61. In what ways did Jesus fulfil this prophecy of Isaiah? In what ways did he not fulfil what Isaiah had anticipated? Jesus entrusted his disciples with the task of proclaiming this same message in Matthew 10:7-8. What does this imply for us as followers of Jesus?
6. Read Isaiah 58:1-12. What does this passage say about religious observances and social justice? The prophet makes a connection between acting justly and experiencing the presence of God. Can you think of a time in your life when you have sensed God’s presence in the context of pursuing justice?
7. Read Galatians 3:26-28. In light of these verses, how does being “in Christ” change our perspective on social justice?
8. What justice issue moves you deeply at this current time? How are you addressing this issue—or how might you? If you are meeting in a group, take some time to pray for one another as you seek to participate in God’s work of bringing about justice on Earth. If you are reflecting on these questions alone, talk to God about this.

Practice for the week: Practicing oneness

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in his letter from Birmingham jail: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

At the start of each day, ask God to open your eyes to injustice. When you encounter injustice during your day, remember that we are all one—all God's children and all connected. Divisions between people are an illusion. How does this impact your view of the injustices you notice? Talk to God about this.

Week 4: A Vision for Peace

1. Was there anything in the message on Sunday that stood out to you? What was most helpful for you? In what ways did it stretch your thinking?
2. Read Isaiah 11:1-9. What stands out to you most about the vision Isaiah describes? How does this vision challenge or encourage you today?
3. What kind of practices do we, as a church and as individuals, need to adopt in order to work toward Isaiah's vision of peace? What attitudes, behaviors, or mindsets do we need to "put on," and what do we need to "take off" in order to align with this vision?
4. In the message, the speaker mentioned that hope is essential to avoiding cynicism and despair. How can we, as a community, nurture hope in the face of current challenges in our world?
5. In the message, the speaker said that diversity isn't the goal of Christian community but the result of an environment of peace, safety, and justice. Do you agree or disagree? How do you see our church or community fostering these qualities? What challenges do we face in this area?
6. Isaiah describes a leader who judges with wisdom and justice, especially advocating for the poor and oppressed. How does this image of leadership compare to the leadership we see in the world today? What role can we play in fostering this kind of justice?

Practice for the week: Living out Isaiah's vision of peace

Spend some time this week re-reading and reflecting on Isaiah 11:6-9. As you read, reflect on these questions:

- Where do you see division, conflict, or hostility in your life that contrasts with this vision?
- Where do you see diversity, peace, and harmony in your life that aligns with this vision?

Next, think about one specific situation or relationship in your life where you can work toward peace, safety, and harmony.

- Is there someone you need to forgive, reach out to, or offer support to?
- Is there a way you can promote justice or stand up for someone in your community?
- Is there someone in your life whose experiences you need to better understand by taking time to listen to their story and perspective?

Write down any actions or steps you feel prompted to take. Then, close with a prayer, asking for God's guidance and strength to live out Isaiah's vision in your life

Week 5: A Community Vision

During the service, two members of our community were interviewed, sharing their reflections on their experiences with Cedar Ridge's vision. The questions asked during the interview were intended to prompt deeper thought about what inspires, challenges, and shapes each person's journey within the church. These questions are valuable for all of us to reflect on and discuss with others. Engaging in these conversations allows us to hear one another's stories, gain new perspectives, and explore how the church's vision shapes us to be a community of hope and transformation.

Below are the five questions used during the interview:

1. Introduce yourself: What's your name, and how long you have been a part of the Cedar Ridge community?
2. What initially drew you to Cedar Ridge, and how has our vision influenced your decision to stay?
3. What part of Cedar Ridge's vision do you find most challenging or stretching for you personally?
4. How have you seen Cedar Ridge's vision evolve over the years?
5. In what ways do you think Cedar Ridge's vision impacts the broader community beyond just our church members?

Week 6: Our Values

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. Below is a list and explanation of the values we hold together as a community. Read them one at a time and for each of them discuss the following questions:
 - What do you find most compelling about this value?
 - What do you find most challenging or even troubling?
 - How do you see us currently living out this value collectively as a community?
 - In what ways do we need to change to be more aligned with this value as a community?
 - For you personally, how are you currently living this value?
 - How do you need to personally align with it more?
3. After discussing, break up into smaller groups of 2 or 3 (or stay together as a larger group if that feels appropriate) and each share the one value about which you feel most challenged currently and why. Then spend some time praying for one another.

Practice for the week: Living Our Values

This week choose a different one of our values each day and intentionally try to embody it. In the morning take a moment to quieten and center yourself. Read the value slowly twice, inviting God's presence to partner with you in living this value throughout your daily activities. Be conscious of the value (as well as God's presence with you) as you go about your work, as you interact with people, as you engage online, as you rest and play. Be aware of your thoughts and emotions in all these interactions (whether voiced or expressed or not) and partner with God's Spirit by letting go and aligning with the value.

Cedar Ridge Values

Love: This is our highest value and the one that undergirds all our others. Love is what we see in Jesus, the way we define God, and the way we seek to relate to others. As followers of Jesus our journey is ultimately a progressive experience of oneness with God and oneness with one another. For us, love is our final authority and more important than being right. We will disagree on all manner of things, but we will always love.

Hope: We celebrate the reality embodied in Jesus that God never gives up on the world or any single one of us. This hope drives our commitment to transformation. As followers of Jesus, we believe we can all become healthier and more loving people, and the world can become a more just and loving place. We choose to believe the best about others, ourselves, and the future, and we work creatively and imaginatively to bring about new realities and possibilities.

Diversity: We welcome and treasure our differences embodied in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, culture, age and abilities and intentionally pursue a community culture where everyone has a sense of inclusion and belonging. We honor the different spiritual paths we have each walked and see our differences as a gift because we each have the most to learn from those who are least like us.

Humility: We adopt the servant-hearted posture of Jesus in putting others first. We are honest about our weaknesses and mistakes and authentically strive to change. We pursue vulnerability in relationships, and are committed to working through conflict, rather than walking away. While striving to act and speak with integrity, we seek new understandings of ourselves and others rather than proving ourselves right.

Justice: We seek to live justly and work for justice in our relationships, our communities, and in society as whole. We express this personally (being the change we want to see in world) through our behaviors, what we buy, what we consume, and how we treat both people and nature. We express this corporately through the struggle against systems that perpetuate racial, economic, social and environmental injustice.

Journey: We see life as a journey and all of us are in process. That means none of us are the finished article so we can have patience with ourselves and others. Transformation takes time, so we are committed to faithful practice and not giving up. We embrace mystery and acknowledge the role of both faith and doubt in our journey, recognizing that it takes us into both new understandings as well as new uncertainties. So we remain openhearted and openminded: to God and to one another.