



- WEEK 4 - VISION GATHERING -

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen Christ working in your life in the last week? And... how's your vision? Is it 20/20, you can read all the way to the copyright script at the bottom of the eye chart? Or are you like Pastor Mike... it's a good thing glasses were invented or you'd have been culled from the herd a long time ago.

OPENING PRAYER

God, do something cool in our lives,
in the lives of those around us, and in our faith community.

INTRODUCTION

Today, we take a little detour from the normal routine of this series to talk about our faith community, who we are and who we'd like to be. Each year, we take an early Sunday, and talk about our vision. No, not the kind that requires that freaky glaucoma test where they blow a puff of air into your eye... (that's really just a practical joke optometrists have been playing on us for years, right?) But rather the

kind of vision that will guide and direct our faith community for the year to come.

Now, this fits perfectly into our current series as we started this year with a bit o' vision, our prayer initiative, where we have committed to praying this very simple, yet powerful prayer. Let's say it together, "God...

"DO SOMETHING COOL"

And the things that we're committing to for 2024 will hopefully be bolstered by this prayer, that God will open doors and move powerfully within our church. So, as we continue to pray for God to do something cool in our faith community in 2024, we will spend today talking about what those cool things might be.

Question 1: First, how did you find The Connection? Did someone invite you? Did we pop up on your Google Search for "the coolest church in town"? Or did you walk into Sneaky's hoping for a burger and accidentally walk into worship... then were to embarrassed to admit it and just stayed?

STORY & SCRIPTURE

Before Pastor Mike had the "cool moments" on his sabbatical we've talked about the last 3 weeks, he found himself in Tampa, Florida, for the launch of a friend's church. (The fact that he just happened to be there the week they were launching was just another cool thing God

did on this trip.) But that night, sitting on the beach during sunset, he considered the vision for the church he was being asked to start. The idea that we would seek *to connect people to God, to each other, and to the world around us* began to formulate into a name and a icon. (Yes, this was where our logo icon, what we call our molecule, and our mission and vision statement began.) Four months later, at the first vision gatherings of our faith community, this mission statement, name, and logo were affirmed, and thus we became The Connection.

After the “cool moments” in Acts that we’ve covered to this point, we begin to see a shift. As we’ve said, Acts is just a run of God doing cool things. But to this point, the “cool things” that happen are mostly happening *to* the apostles: Peter having his Shawshank Redemption moment being broken out of prison, Cornelius’s vision and the ministry to the gentiles, Philip running into the Ethiopian eunuch. But now, we see a transition...

Read Acts, chapter 13, verses 1 through 3.

Starting with this passage, the cool things aren’t so much happening *to* the apostles, as they are happening *because of* the apostles. In verse 3, it says Saul and Barnabas were prayed for and then “sent out.” They are given a commission to go out into the world.

Question 2: Talk about this story. What catches your attention about what is happening here for these men? How would you have felt if

you were the ones chosen to go travel the world? How would you have felt were you the ones called to stay behind?

REFLECTION

With this passage, the “cool things” that happen aren’t happening in Jerusalem or the surrounding area as much, at least, those aren’t the stories we’re told. From here out, the cool stuff happens as the apostles are spreading the Good News about Jesus hundreds of miles away. The prayer they’re praying now isn’t “God, do something cool *to us*” anymore. It’s “God, let *us* do something cool.” To this point, we’ve been praying the prayer, “God, do something cool,” with the implication that it happen to us, in *our* lives. Whereas we still want to pray that prayer, we now take a note from the apostles here in chapter 13, and turn the prayer outward. We will pray the prayer, “God, let *us* do something cool, too.” See, sometimes for that cool thing to happen, it requires *us* to be the one to do it. God wants to do the cool thing in someone else’s life, and we are the instrument God has chosen to get it done. The Holy Spirit, in verse 2, calls it, “*the special work*” to which the apostles have been called. God has a *special work*, or dare we phrase it, “something cool,” we have been called to do in someone else’s life.

Because this week is our Vision Gathering week, we’re going to ask that question of ourselves as a faith community. “What is the special work, the cool thing, that God is asking us to do?” So, for the rest of the time, we’ll work through a few questions that will form into that vision for 2024. Let’s begin...

Question 3: What was your favorite thing from the last 12 months? Feel free to go back and review previous worship series, events, and engagement partners. (And if you can't think of anything, maybe that's telling, too.)

Question 4: Given that our mission is "to connect to God, each other, and the world around us," what would you like to see in the future? That is, what, of who we are and who we have decided to be, aren't we doing yet? There's nothing too crazy, let the imagination run wild!

CLOSING

From a beach in Clearwater, Florida, and vision gatherings in Edwardsville 5 years ago, this is who we are and what we do. The mission and vision we have as a faith community will influence our "special work" in 2024, as it did for Saul and Barnabas in Acts. We will continue to pray for God to do something cool in our lives and in this faith community, but we will also pray, "God, let *us* do something cool, too." And we will commit this year to doing something cool and letting God work in us and through us as a church. So, keep praying this prayer as often as possible... "God,

"DO SOMETHING COOL"

But then ask yourself, "how is God calling me to help The Connection do something cool in 2024? How can I make a difference in my faith

community?” Then, as Saul and Barnabas did, go and do that *special work*... go and do something cool.

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.

Close in prayer.