

Light of the World, Part 2

September 13, 2026 – Vision Sunday on Celebration Weekend | Matthew 5:14-16

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God Is Inviting Us to Advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ

On the night of April 18, 1775, Paul Revere and others were in place, ready to ride out to rouse the countryside, but they were waiting for a signal.

Most of Boston knew something was about to happen. British troops were moving to seize Patriot military supplies in Concord. How would they move? Robert Newman, the sexton of Old North Church, had to sneak past British officers lodging in his house to hang lanterns in the church steeple to signal British plans. One if the King's troops were marching out of Boston by land, two if they were crossing the Charles River by boat. That night, he hung two lanterns in the steeple, and the riders set off on their mission.¹ A great movement can depend on how we respond to two lanterns hanging in a church tower.

Turning 50 is a time to ask, "Who are we? What does God want us to do?"

Three years ago, Church Chairman Tom Turbiak and I pulled together a team of staff, Elders, and members to start asking and answering those questions. Their answers grip me, and I hope they grip you, too.

God is inviting us to Advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I've shared the outline of this vision with you over the past six months. But let's review it again.

The Gospel is advancing powerfully around the world today, and we pray that:

- The Gospel will advance in us
- We will baptize 100 people each year
- We will gather with 1,900 people weekly to worship

How?

Reach the Next Generation of Children, Students, and Young Adults

We hope to reach 500 people under age 25 and make Valley a destination for families.

Launch People into Ministry Across the Street and Around the World

We want to help 300 people identify their gifts and calling, and raise up a new generation of leaders, pastors, and missionaries.

Build Bridges to Faith by Caring for Hurting People

We want to build thriving, biblical marriages; help people find freedom in Christ; care for people with disabilities, foster families, senior adults, and others. In the process we want to help people come to faith in Christ.

Light Up Our Great Big Backyard Across Hartford and Litchfield Counties

¹ *Paul Revere's Ride* by David Hackett Fischer, p. 100.

We want to personally share our faith with lost people, partner with churches and agencies across the region, and plant new churches.

This vision felt like God speaking to those of us who worked to discern God's calling on our church.

It moves me, and I pray that it feels like God speaking to you! It's like lanterns are hanging in a steeple, a signal is given, and we're waiting below. How will we respond?

God Created our Church to Advance the Gospel

Valley wasn't made by a dedicated group of people alone; it was an act of God.

This weekend we're telling stories about the people who started this church and served her for the past 50 years. It may sound like they built this church. Their hard work was critical, but God built this church. He made us who we are and has given us a mission!

Forty years ago, Pastor John Peterson reminded us that God made us to advance the Gospel.

We have Pastor John's final sermon here at Valley. I heard it earlier this year and was struck, John, by the vision you laid out for us.

I believe that God desires this congregation to share the Gospel with every single person in the valley. And I think it's doable under God's leadership. I think that possibly, I'm not as sure of this one, I believe that possibly God wants this congregation to take responsibility for the entire state of Connecticut and sharing the Gospel with them. There are dozens of towns that are growing rapidly in Connecticut that have nobody sharing the Gospel effectively there. I believe that God may be calling this church to an aggressive leadership-development program, so that a few years from now this church could be sending out laymen and -women who start evangelical churches that win people and grow over the entire state of Connecticut. You've always obeyed Him in the past and done his will. I believe you will continue to do that, and as you continue to do that, you will see hundreds of people come to Christ.

Reach the Farmington Valley, maybe all of Connecticut. Raise up leaders. Plant churches. The first time I heard these words, I was blown away. It sounded very much like what Pastor Jay Abramson said to us in the Grace and Mercy Vision. And it sounds very much like what we're saying now in the Advance Vision. Do you know what that means? This isn't a program. It's a calling from God that is engrained in us as a congregation. It's who we are.

So, when Ann Silk read Matthew 5:14-16 when we were praying about our vision, I teared up.

The team praying about God's vision for this church had been working for some time. We had written down lots of details. Ann, who was on the team, said that this reminded her of **Matthew 5:14-16** where Jesus says,

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

I was moved because it sounded like Jesus had just described us together. Our mission, yes, and our identity too. One of our deepest dreams—to shine with the light of Jesus Christ so that all the world can see and be drawn to Him! God is already on the move.

God's Spirit Is Stirring Hearts and Calling Us Now

God is stirring hearts, and we see evidence of it every week.

I think of Charles. In 2025, he finished a post-high school transition program for adults with autism. His mom, Ying, and dad, Ming, began looking for opportunities to keep him engaged and learned about Friendship Community here at Valley. They walked in and were welcomed warmly. They heard about Friendship on Sundays—our Sunday worship experience for people with special needs and their families—and decided to check it out. They stayed and have been part of it since. This past summer, Ying shared that as someone who has no family in the area, she was grateful that God had given her a church family. God is moving!

Now is the moment to be who we were made to be!

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes life in the Kingdom of God. He's telling us what true righteousness looks like. He opens with the Beatitudes and tells us that the merciful and the peacemakers are blessed. They're welcome in the Kingdom of God. He tells us that the world will think we're crazy and may reject us. How do we respond to them? Be salt, He says first. Add the flavor of God to the world. Then He tells us to shine His light into the darkness. Share Good News and do good deeds. That's how we respond to the darkness. That's who we are. And that's who God is calling us to be right now.

Imagine how God Could Advance the Gospel Through Us

Paul Revere roused a countryside ready to go.

He had spent years networking, getting to know the towns and their leaders, and stoking their fire for revolution. So, everywhere he went, Paul Revere knew the person to wake and warn. Many of them warned their own towns, then got on horses themselves and raced to other towns to raise the alarm. Soon, news had reached New Hampshire, and towns everywhere were sending militia to Lexington and Concord. The American Revolution had started! Now, imagine what God can do through us.

Imagine what God could do through our young adults.

I visited with our Young Adult Ministry on a Tuesday night recently. I was blown away to see the room packed. And they're still bringing friends. Pretty soon, they're going to need a bigger room. We want to see more of that! We want to pray and sacrifice and invite so that more members of the next generation can come to faith in Jesus Christ and begin following Him.

We do need to talk about our buildings.

Valley is blessed with fantastic facilities. But the last time we really addressed our building needs was 25 years ago now. We need to make our buildings ready for the future and the vision God has given us.

What God is already doing shows us clearly what God might do next.

I think of Taylor Abrahamsen who came to Valley because her best friend, Talia Hart, invited her to church. She met Jesus and became part of our church family. Now she's part of our children's-ministry team and praying about her future in ministry. We want to see more people launching into ministry. Then I think about our baptism service a few weeks ago. We baptized 15 new Christians. Let's do that again and again as we light up our giant backyard. God is already working! Will we say "yes" to Him?

Let's Say Our Joyful "Yes"

This vision is an invitation from God.

God is out there ahead of us reaching the next generation, launching people into ministry, building bridges to faith, and lighting up our backyard. He wants you AND ME to join Him.

Let's own this vision, not just agree with it.

Paul Revere's ride roused the Patriot cause because the whole countryside said, "I'm going to do something." I'm not asking you to agree with me today. I'm telling you that this is where God is leading me, I'm obeying Him, and I'm willing to put my work and my life into His mission. I'm asking you to join me, our Elders, and the other leaders of our church and do the same thing. But what exactly am I asking you to do? What does it mean to say a joyful "Yes!" to God's invitation?

Our joyful yes means that we will pray.

The work of God's people is powered by God's Spirit, not by our good intentions and determination. Would you pray and ask God to capture your own heart and to advance His Gospel in you? And would you pray—fervently and consistently—that God will advance His Gospel through you and me?

It means that we will sacrifice.

Of course, we will give strategically of our time, abilities, and money. That's what we do as disciples of Jesus. But if you have been sitting on the sidelines, then this is the time to give, use your gifts, and spend your time through Valley. Also, reaching the next generation, launching people into ministry, building bridges to faith, and lighting up our backyard will cost us comfort. Something will change that we like. It could be as simple as the color of the carpet in the lobby. But something will change. And we will have to ask ourselves, "Am I willing to sacrifice my comfort so that someone else can know Jesus?" I will sacrifice. Will you?

And it means that we will invite.

We will invite people to Valley and invite them to begin following Jesus. Personally. Because we're grateful for our church, and desperately grateful to God for our salvation, and because we can't help but share that with the people we love. That's when we'll really grow.

And, as Jesus said, all the glory goes to God!

This is His church; it always has been. It's His mission. We are His people. Saying "yes" to Him is not a chore. It's a joy.