

# God's Vision for Rochester

## *Breakthrough Christianity:*

John 17:20-21

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We men can be so courageous. In the movie *John Q.* Denzel Washington plays a father whose son needs a heart transplant. At the end he is ready to take his own life so that his son can have his heart. Most fathers can identify with his desperation and willingness to give his life for his child; however, that courage melts away when that child asks, "Where did I come from?" We fathers start beading with sweat as we think about our answer. Then the light comes on and we reply, "Go ask your mother." Courageous, right? Mom looks at us with eyes that could be mistaken for daggers and then turns to the child and coolly answers, "You came from Kentucky (or some such place);" and the child says, "Oh, thank you."

Children rightfully ask about their origin because it helps them figure out who they are and what they are about. The answer is a piece of God's vision for them. Where they live now is also a piece of that vision. Do you know anything about the origin of Rochester, why this city is here, why God brought you here and what purpose you are to fulfill? You are not here by chance, and neither is this city. You are not here simply by your choice either. God's hand was in the circumstance and relationships that put you here. In some ways you are to be shaped by this city; and as a believer in some ways you are to shape this city.

God has a big vision for your life. It's big because God is big. God is great. This big vision can be seen in part from Paul's discussion with the philosophers of Athens.

***From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:26-27, NIV)***

Paul said that our time and exact place was determined by God. It is not by chance. God has a purpose for our time and place. There is a reason for Rochester, and there is a reason why we inhabit it. There is an outcome that God has in mind. We are here as a community so that people will seek, reach out and find God. The question is “How is that to happen?”.

Rochester was founded where several streams fed into the Zumbro River. It was a place of refreshment and rest for travelers. Later for the military, it became a place of protection and healing for those suffering injury and disease. The place came to carry the name of a British nobleman whose initiative and adventures gave birth to Rochester, New York. The innovative and pioneering spirit associated with that name proved prophetic. Rochester would become a place of innovation and pioneering in restoring people to health through the sisters of St. Francis and the Mayo brothers; and much later it would equip and offer solutions to produce healthy businesses and organizations throughout the world. Rochester would grow as a place of respite, refreshment, restoration and finally reorientation. People now come here from all over the world to learn and relearn areas of skill; and people leave here to teach, resource and serve all over the world in healthcare and business. However, the purpose of Rochester is deeper. We were established to help people all over the world find God.

God’s grace is so amazing, so encompassing. One day I was reading the book of Revelation, and a text leaped off its pages. I was in Revelation 5 where John is caught up in the spirit and enters the throne room of God. There he saw a lamb, who had been slain, take a scroll; and those in the throne room worshiped him and sang:

***With your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.*** (Rev 5:9-10, NIV)

God's love and vision for the world penetrates every cluster of humanity on the globe. It reaches every nation or ethnic group. It draws from every language. It encompasses every people, which traditionally were identified with cities or villages. God's dream, indeed destiny, penetrates to every tribe of humanity. A tribe in the time of John spoke of people who were bonded because of their blood or association, such as neighborhoods. Literally, it spoke of kinship networks. In other words, every human being on this planet would have a friend, a kin, who is their priest, praying for them and serving them on behalf of Christ. "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests." Five times in Revelation God uses the words tribe, language, people and nation to describe the encompassing work of his salvation or the permeation of evil. Not once are those words in the same order. God is not divulging a plan to reach humanity with these words as much as he is showing us that it is his plan is to reach every cluster of humanity. It is his plan, and it is our call.

Don't you think God would already have us spread out all over the earth if we were to just bring the gospel to a few people from each city? It is not his will that even one of his lost children perish? That's what Peter wrote (2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, God wants his disciples deployed as priests to every single human being, whether they sit in jail, play at school, lie in a hospital bed or sleep in a homeless shelter.

Could you imagine a time in our city when every resident, every worker and every visitor had a friend here who was praying for them and serving them as God's priest? Can you imagine how we could help cities and villages all over the globe experience that same level of witness? That's our destiny. That's our call, but it can't be done by congregations and believers isolated

from one another. It can't be done unless Jesus prayer is answered in our lives. What did he pray? He called to his father saying:

***I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony. My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father--that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me.*** (John 17:20-21, NLT)

Can you imagine a community where prayer for the lost, hurting and suffering never ceases? Can you imagine a community where believers organize and sustain prayer on behalf of their city around the clock every day of the year? Can you imagine a city where every street is walked by praying people, where every home is covered by praying believers, where every business, every hotel room, every lot, not a single person or inch of real estate is neglected by Christ's disciples? That can only be done if the believers of a community are one, one in love, one in purpose, one in answer to the prayer of our Lord Jesus.

Did you know that there is a region in northeast India of 750,000 people where 80 percent are in church each week worshipping Jesus? They've deployed a thousand missionaries worldwide. It is the only region of India that has no homeless, no beggars, no starvation and 100 percent literacy. Four generations earlier the inhabitants were headhunters. Does God love us in Rochester less? Do you really believe that God's will for us is less?

We cannot afford to be sectarian. The issue here is not whether you're United Methodist or belong to Bethany. The issue is Christ. He is the way, the truth and the life! Let's join with our brothers and sisters of other congregations, bend our knees together before our Father and offer everyone in our community and region the bread from heaven. That's God's vision for us. We are called to be an innovative, pioneering people, bringing respite, refreshment, restoration, reorientation and reconciliation with God. We are God's Rochester area team!