

1 I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. 2 Then the LORD replied: "Write down the vision and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. 3 For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

On the day after France surrendered to Nazi Germany during World War II . . . the pastor of the Reformed congregation in the small village of Le Chambon sur Lignon in southern France, stepped into the pulpit and proclaimed: "The responsibility of Christians is to resist the violence that will be brought to bear on their consciences through the weapons of the spirit." Over the next four years the villagers . . . did just that. In a remarkable display of faithfulness and courage, which cost several of the participants their lives, the approximately five thousand people in the village and surrounding hamlets provided sanctuary to over five thousand Jews, saving them from the massacre of the Nazi death camps. [Later], when asked . . . how they came to make such a risky decision to provide sanctuary for the Jews, the villagers generally looked at their interrogator with a puzzled expression on their faces and replied with comments such as 'It happened so naturally, we can't understand the fuss. I happened quite simply; I helped simply because they needed to be helped. . . . The Bible says to feed the hungry, to visit the sick. It's a normal thing to do.'<sup>1</sup>

You find a picture of the church in Le Chambon on your bulletin cover. It's a rather non-descript church, not the type you'd stop to take a picture of were you driving through the town. Unless, of course, you knew the history of the community of resistance that was born there after stirring a sermon that encouraged the folks to stand up to the power of the Nazi invaders and shelter the least—namely the Jews—among them. Now, when I read this story to the Educational Enhancement Committee, I saw on their faces the looks that many of you have on your faces now—looks of admiration and astonishment at the ministry of that small community of resistance in southern France. And I'm curious to know if the looks on your faces will continue to mirror the looks on their faces when I go on to tell you what I went on to tell them. We, the people of Suttons Bay Congregational Church, are also a community of resistance. Now, if Judy Walter had had a drink in her mouth when I made that statement, she surely would have spewed it all over the table so astounded was she at what had been said. Indeed, many members of the committee challenged me on the point. But I believed it then and I believe it even more now—Suttons Bay Congregational Church is a community of resistance. And I'm not talking about a bunch of folks marching on the street burning their unmentionables and singing protest songs—though that is a community of resistance—one that some of you belonged to back in the day. But in so far as, according to one of my Chicago program professors, a community of resistance is "shaped by a distinctive way of seeing the world and by [unique] practices and virtues", we ARE a community of resistance and like any other community of resistance, we're sticking it to "the man". Now I know you're thinking—"But Robin, look around, we are the man." And yes, many of us are "the man" in that some, but certainly not all, of us are white, middle-class, educated, participants in or retired from corporate America. But what makes us different from "the man", what makes us NOT a Country Club Church is that we are so much more than the demographics that describe us. We are a church, a community "shaped by a distinctive way of seeing the world and by [unique] practices and virtues." And if you still don't believe me listen to the ways in which our church has resisted various powers, I use the word powers in the sense of "something bigger than ourselves"<sup>2</sup>—our church has resisted powers that bring death and destruction to the world and instead, made choices, some of them self-sacrificial and even dangerous, that reveal that we are "shaped by a distinctive way of seeing the world"—as set out for us by Jesus—and by "unique practices and virtues"—handed down to us through our tradition.

To begin, let's think of our Congregational heritage. Again, on the bulletin you find a picture—this one a of the first separatists, folks who are the ancestors of our congregational faith—as they departed from their beloved

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, 10.

Scrooby, England where they had been forced to worship in secret because they resisted the rules and theology of the Church of England. Indeed, Congregationalism, shoot even Protestantism (the root of the word is protest), began with communities resisting the powers of institutions seemingly stronger and more influential than they were. And why did they resist, even when it meant risking family, friends, and sometimes even life itself? They were a community of resistance because they refused to bow to the powers of greed, domination, and manipulation of, in the case of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church and its “pay to play” schemes and in the case of the Congregationalists, the Church of England. Resistance is in our DNA.

Indeed, Suttons Bay Congregational Church began as a community of resistance, established for the purposes of being the first English speaking church in Leelanau County. Can you imagine the taunts and insults the founders of our church must have received from the wider community? And Lars said to Thor, “What, are you too good, you are destroying our culture, our way of life with your English speaking preacher.” But what would we be had they not been what they were, a community of resistance, standing up against the power of the status quo and the “we’ve always done it that way” folks.

Another example of this church as a community of resistance comes from when Cindy Opie, who sang with her folks in church this morning, was a kid. At that time, our Sunday School met with the Sunday School of the Lutheran Church across the street. When the Lutherans needed to change the time of classes to accommodate their worship schedule, a group of parents in this church resisted the power of the idea that “bigger is better” and decided to go out on their own and establish our own Sunday School—a Sunday School that Cindy Opie’s children now attend. A Sunday School born out of a community of resistance.

And speaking of our Sunday School—if you look at our budget and the amount of money we spend on our Christian Education program and then you look at the number of children we have in the program, you would see that we spend a disproportionate percentage of our budget on the children of this church. Because at Suttons Bay Congregational Church, we resist the power that says children should be seen and not heard. We want to see them, hear them, hug them, and assure that they have the resources and guidance they need to become disciples of Christ. We have a distinctive way of seeing the world that comes from our belief that, as Cheryl read this morning, Jesus said “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

And the list of the ways in which this church is a community of resistance—“shaped by a distinctive way of seeing the world and by [unique] practices and virtues”—goes on. The powers of youth and health say that older seniors or sick people aren’t worth much and yet we have Munson and TenderCare employees and volunteers who resist that message and live otherwise. The powers of wealth and greed say to get as much money as you can however you can and our church resists those powers and regularly gives large sums of money away and makes decisions that sacrifice income we could be bringing in. There are powers that say everyone has to be the same, dressing and acting in certain ways and we resist those powers with kids who acolyte in holey jeans and adults who wear shorts and Birkenstocks to church. (Okay, so it’s really only my husband but you all welcome him anyway.) There are powers that say to “leave well enough alone” and yet we resist the power of indifference and don’t just name the problem, but find a solution to it. There are powers of selfishness that say, “You’re retired, you’ve done your time” and yet this place is full of retirees who resist the temptation to rest on your laurels and instead you volunteer at the food pantry or the school or the Rotary or the PEO or the hospital. There are powers that say that men should be men, macho and tough and yet it was a group of men in this church who resisted that power and purchased a Christ Candle for this sanctuary in honor of their dear friend Tom and those men stood up here on a Sunday morning, many of them with tears in their eyes, to proclaim their love for their friend by reading tender words of scripture.

We are a community of resistance in the best sense of the term. And one of my favorite ways we express this is by the ways we get on with each other. I don’t know how you answered the survey you took at the beginning of church—but one thing I love about this place is that one of you who was an unmentionables-burning flower child of the 60s filled out that form this morning while sitting next to her now friend, someone who—while she

was protesting the war, was serving as a Marine recruiter. And one of the highest virtues of this church is that commitment we have to each other—a commitment that, miraculously in this day and age, where so many of the powers seek to divide and insist on red or blue, conservative or liberal, hawk or dove—our commitment to, and love for, one another perseveres through political, cultural, economic, racial, theological, and age differences. We are one—the Suttons Bay Congregational Church—a community that resists the idea that we all have to agree in order to get along, a community that resists the idea that we all have to believe the same things in order to worship together, a community that resists the idea of “us” and “them” and instead focuses on the “we”. We ARE a community of resistance, no matter what your first impressions of that potentially divisive term might have been. Because whether you would have used those words to describe our church or not, the fact of the matter is that you must love this community of resistance, otherwise you would have stayed home, or gone golfing, or gone out on the boat this morning. But no, you resisted those temptations and came here—to this place where we resist the powers of evil and greed, the powers of materialism, ageism, sexism, heterosexism, racism, egoism—all those “ism’s” that divide and destroy—we resist them because we are a community of resistance and I thank God to be among you. And I’m often so overwhelmed by my gratitude that I am rendered speechless. And those are the moments in which I remember that John Calvin said that it is out of a deep sense of gratitude to God that we, in an attempt to show that gratitude, seek to love and serve God with all our hearts.

And for me, that is what the *Grounded in Gratitude Vision Process* that begins today is all about. Because we are grateful to be blessed to be a part of a community of resistance such as this, “we want to love and serve with all our hearts.” Not because we must, but because we may. And when I consider a Vision Process, that is, to me, what it’s all about. It’s not about trying to be what we’re not. It’s not about trying to be all things to all people. It’s not about being the biggest or the best. But it’s about who we already are—a community of resistance that lives each day with such gratitude in our hearts that we can’t help but to love and serve with all our hearts.

Now how your Vision Area Teams will dream and plan for ways to love and serve in ever more faithful and intentional ways, well the very important details of that task are up to you. But as for me, what I envision for this vision process is a vision born of gratitude, a vision that we will “Write down . . . and make plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.” I want our vision to be so clear that each of you will become, in the words of the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk, a herald. That the vision of who and what we are as a church—a community that chooses to exercise the powers of hospitality, welcome, generosity, and love—will be written all over you, all over this community. That we will be known for how we love and serve. Not for the purposes of growing our church or increasing our budget—but for the purposes of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ—not just with ourselves, but with the wider community, indeed with the world. For it’s possible that one day, someone will ask one of you, “Why do you do it? Why do you help? Why is your church how it is?” And when they ask, you’ll respond like the people of Le Chambon, ‘It happened so naturally, we can’t understand the fuss. It happened quite simply; I helped simply because they needed to be helped. . . . The Bible says to feed the hungry, to visit the sick. It’s normal thing to do.’ It’s a normal thing to do when you belong to a community of resistance; a community that lives and serves and loves because it is grounded in gratitude to God. Viva la resistance! Thanks be to God.