

“BRAVE NEW CHURCH”
 (Revelation 3:7-8, 12-13)
 (c) 2012 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 1-8-12]

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1. [BOTH Services] Read Text (9:30am MSG; 11am NRSV): Revelation 3:7-8, 12-13 and Pray.

2. In 1932 author Aldous Huxley wrote the now famous social satire novel Brave New World.

A--Set about 500 years in the future, it's a story about one man's struggle to fit into the "Brave New World" of a World-State society which had been created to grant happiness and contentment to all people.

B--But the happiness and contentment it promised was made possible only through the sacrifice of individual freedom, morality, and religion, which were all tightly controlled by the one World-State government through genetics and drugs.

C--And in the end, readers come to understand that Huxley's "Brave New World" of the future is certainly *not* the ideal paradise that anyone would want to live in.

3. Well you know, in today's world we, too, often have dreams about the future that turn out disappointing – “pipe dreams” whose reality simply don't live up to the high expectations that they promise.

A--And yet, as people of faith, we believe in a God who promises us visions of the future which do *not* disappoint –...

B--...Dreams and Visions about who we can *become* which are based *not* on the inconsistency and fickleness of *humanity* (as in Huxley's book), but which are instead based on the absolute certainty and trustworthiness of *God's* faithfulness.

4. And in today's scripture from Revelation 3, we find an example of just such a Vision.

A--The city of Philadelphia was originally established by the Greeks 200 years earlier as a Missionary outpost of Greek culture to all of Asia Minor (present day Turkey).

1--And as it developed, it became a crossroads of sorts for trade, commerce & ideas.

2--And in Revelation 3, God gives this city another great opportunity: ...to be a conduit through which the gospel of Jesus could be shared with the entire region.

B--In Verse 8 God expresses it this way: (MSG) “I’ve opened a door before you that no one can slam shut.” (NRSV) “Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut” – in a manner of speaking, they were given a vision from God to become a “Brave New Church” that would *not* disappoint.

5. You know, like that church at Philadelphia, here at East Cobb U.M.C. I believe that God is giving us a vision to become a “*Brave New Church*,” as well.

A--Like them, I believe He is setting before us an “open door” of opportunity for ministry.

1--Some of these are beginning to happen as we speak, like our new digital sign that should be operational within the next few weeks.

2--Some opportunities are part of our church-wide goals that we adopted last November (like a new digital communications ministry), and some (like new building & renovation plans) will be more fully defined in the coming months by our church’s Strategic Planning Team.

B--But in the meantime, I want to share just a few of my own thoughts about what I believe that that vision might include as I look through that “open door” into our church’s future.

–II–

6. First of all, I see **a community-oriented church, living up to its calling/mission** of being “*A Mosaic of God’s Family*”...

A--...A place where people of differing ages, races, socio-economic backgrounds, politics, differing Christian beliefs and worship preferences work *together* for the common cause of lifting up the name of Jesus Christ, and glorifying Him through shared ministry, *despite* their many differences.

B--As part of this, I see an expanded “Lighthouse Academy” -- a premiere day care center drawing up to 150 children from our community, whose structure is fully integrated into the life of East Cobb church, and whose ministry is fully embraced by church members.

C--I see a church known for its passion and desire to meet the physical and spiritual needs of people in need in our community and world -- known for its “out of the box” mission ministries that inspire the heart and transform lives.

D--I see a church offering a new off-site worship experience of some sort (maybe at Mazzy’s), reaching people who won’t darken the doors of a church building.

E--I see a church that offers “Celebrate Recovery” -- a Christ-centered recovery ministry that helps those trapped by addiction to drugs, alcohol, sex, and gambling.

F--I see a Christian counseling ministry added to an expanded Stephen Ministry that helps address the stresses of people's lives and emotions.

G--And see even more ministry integration and partnership between our church and both our Kenyan Fellowship and Marietta Campground.

7. And to support these *community* ministries, through that "open door" I also see a variety of **other things**, as well.

A--One of those begins today with the launch of a new online tool for information, prayer, community-building, and giving called "**The City**" – it's free, and I want to encourage every East Cobb member and friend to learn more about it and sign up for it in the Narthex after worship today.

B--I see the formation of 3-5 new Sunday School classes and other small groups to deepen the faith of current believers, and 2-3 new "seeker"-type groups for new Christians and those exploring faith.

C--I also see a Staff which is structured around our overall church purpose of Gathering, Growing and Going, and I see a church whose members aren't afraid to step forward to be trained and equipped to be the new kind of Leaders that a "Brave New Church" will require.

D--And to facilitate these ministries, I see a renovated Annex and Sanctuary, with a new Fellowship Hall near them both, along with an expanded parking lot, and new access to it from Sewell Mill Rd.

–III--

8. Now, all of this may sound great, but the problem is that if we read the context of Vs 8 carefully, it says that no one can shut this "open door" of opportunity *except* ourselves --perhaps you've heard it before, "*We cannot become who God wants us to become by remaining who we are.*"

- 9 So, let me suggest that for us to become that "Brave New Church" will require at least 3 things:...

A--First and foremost, it will require **PRAYER** --with us staying in touch with God, seeking Him with our whole being for guidance not only about his *will* for us as church, but also about His *way* and His *time* for the carrying out of *His* vision for us.

B--Second, it will require **RISK** -- using being willing to do things differently, to risk feeling uncomfortable for a time while we learn the value of new ways and forms, and even be willing to risk losing some long-time members who God is *not* calling to come along *with* us on this journey (and not feel threatened by their decision to follow God elsewhere).

C--Finally, to become a "Brave New Church," it'll also require a willingness to **SACRIFICE** -- the sacrifice of our time, talents, spiritual gifts, and (yes) our money, and even a willingness to sacrifice a presumption that the ministry we want will be provided by "someone else." ¹

D--In other words, if we as church members/friends are not willing to Pray, Risk, and Sacrifice, then there's *no way* we can become the "Brave New Church" that God wants us to be – God's "open door" of opportunity can only be "shut" by our *own* laziness.

–IV–

10. The bottom line is that I believe God has some great plans in store for us here at East Cobb United Methodist Church.

A--More than a disappointing "pipe dream" conjured up by our own minds, I believe He has "*set before us an open door*" – a vision of opportunity for ministry that will *not* disappoint *IF* we're willing to Pray, Risk, and Sacrifice in order to see it come to pass.

B--And if we, in faith, will be willing to step through this "open door" that God shows us, then I believe He'll shape and mold us into a "*Brave New Church*" that will literally transform our community for Jesus Christ!

11. [PRAYER: "*O God, give us not only your vision for us as you people, but give us also courage, ability, and boldness to carry it out, so that we may truly be a mosaic of your family, gathering to embrace you and all people, growing in faith, love and joy, and going into the world to serve and share Jesus. For it's in his name that we pray, Amen.*"]
12. [HOLY COMMUNION -- Invite congregants to pray during altar prayer time after Communion for God's vision for ECUMC to be accomplished]
13. [11am Closing HYMN #451, "*Be Thou My Vision*"]

ENDNOTES:

¹ That is, some of you will need to step out of your comfort zone and volunteer to help in a ministry, or to lead one, or to worship more regularly, or give more deeply out of your finances than you do now – it'll take your Sacrifice to become the "Brave New Church" that you want it to be.