# “What Might Be”

## *2 Kings 6:8-17 (The Message)*

The story of *The Spyglass* captures a powerful and important truth that we need to remember as we prepare for our “A Hope And A Future” weekend, and as we move forward into the future: God has things in store for our church that will require us to exercise faith, and to walk not by what we see or know, but by what might be. Or as the apostle Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians 5:7—to *walk by faith, not by sight*.

***It’s no secret that our worship attendance has been down for some time. As I’ve shared with the Administrative Board, this is because a number of people have health issues that prevent them from being here regularly. Perhaps you sometimes count yourself among that number. It’s just a reality in an aging congregation. We have fewer people to participate consistently than in years past.***

***And no doubt some of you have been wondering “What will happen to my church in five years? Who will be here in ten years’ time?” These are good questions—and needed questions. But we know they are also difficult questions. They ask us to have discussions, consider alternatives, weigh decisions, and make changes that are hard. Such circumstances challenge our comforts and practices. They ask us to consider what we haven’t considered before, or what we’ve chosen to ignore.***

The event we’re planning in September—“A Hope And A Future” weekend—is designed to help us start asking the right questions and exploring the answers that arise. Eddie Hammett will be our guest speaker for the Friday evening and Saturday morning event. He’s a church consultant, coach, author and leader with experience working in a variety of churches across many denominations. We’ve invited him—and are sponsoring this event—to aid us (and any churches that want to participate) in looking ahead and listening for what God is saying to us. This journey will require us to see with our spiritual eyes--with the eyes of faith. Turn with me to our Scripture reading for today, 2nd Kings 6:8-17.

At this point in history, the once-great nation of Israel had been divided due to internal political issues. What was known as the Northern Kingdom was called Israel; its capital was Samaria. The Southern Kingdom was called Judah; its capital was Jerusalem. Each kingdom had its own king, policies, enemies and allies.

At one point the Northern Kingdom of Israel was engaged in a war with neighboring Aram. Let’s pick up our Scripture reading in verse 8: *One time when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, after consulting with his officers, he said, “At such and such a place I want an ambush set.”*

*9[Elisha] sent a message to the king of Israel: “Watch out when you’re passing this place, because Aram has set an ambush there.” 10So the king of Israel sent word concerning the place of which [Elisha] had warned him. This kind of thing happened all the time.*

*11The king of Aram was furious over all this. He called his officers together and said, “Tell me, who is leaking information to the king of Israel? Who is the spy in our ranks?”*

*12But one of his men said, “No, my master, dear king. It’s not any of us. It’s Elisha the prophet in Israel. He tells the king of Israel everything you say, even what you whisper in your bedroom.”*

*13The king said, “Go and find out where he is. I’ll send someone and capture him.”*

*The report came back, “He’s in Dothan.”*

*14Then he dispatched horses and chariots, an impressive fighting force. They came*

*by night and surrounded the city. 15Early in the morning a servant of [Elisha’s] got up and went out. Surprise! Horses and chariots surrounding the city!*

Elisha, his disciples, and the people of the city of Dothan awoke to the shock of Aram’s army all around them! One of Elisha’s disciples, naturally enough, freaked out: *“Oh, master! What shall we do?”*

And Elisha said something peculiar: *16“Don’t worry about it—there are more on our side than on their side.”* Did Dothan have a greater army than Aram? No. Were there more volunteer militia inside the city just itching for a fight? No. Then how could Elisha say there were more on Dothan’s side than on Aram’s?

Because Elisha could see with the eyes of faith. He was walking so closely with God that he had a spiritual insight no one else did. Look at verse 17: *Then Elisha prayed, “O God, open his eyes and let him see.” The eyes of the young man were opened and he saw. A wonder! The whole mountainside full of horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha!* God was on their side! The armies of heaven were ready to fight on behalf of Elisha and the city! Aram didn’t stand a chance because in the spiritual realm God had already won the battle.

So what does this have to do with the story of *The Spyglass*, our church and the future? Just this: What we do as a church in the future will be limited only by our vision. If we choose to see only with our physical eyes, we will see obstacles, problems, barriers and insufficiency. But--if we choose to see with our spiritual eyes—with the eyes of faith, as Elisha did—we will see what might be.

In the story of *The Spyglass*, the king only saw his kingdom in its defeated and bleak condition. ***This is what happens in a lot of aging, established congregations. People only see what they can’t do anymore, what they don’t have. They remember “the good old days”—but can’t see much hope for the future.***

In the story, the king and his people had lived so long with just such a reality that they had forgotten how great their kingdom could be. They looked at the far-away kingdom, shining and strong, and longed for the same thing. ***Churches do the same thing. They’ve lived with declining attendance or giving or participation for so long--and they’ve compared themselves to the larger, more successful churches around them—that they’ve become convinced it can’t get any better.*** But in truth, the downtrodden kingdom already had the same thing as the far-away kingdom. They had just forgotten it. They had lost their ability to hope and dream and have faith.

As we continue throughout this year we’re going to talk more about our future. We’re going to learn more about stepping out, taking risks, making changes, and trusting in the leadership of the Holy Spirit. While our current situation might appear bleak—maybe even hopeless to some—it does not look like that from God’s perspective. God sees potential. God sees resources. God sees a new era of ministry.

I’d like you to think back with me for a moment—to the year 1860. **ASK: What’s significant about the year 1860 for us?** *[It was the beginning of Soddy UMC].* I want to remind you of some things that Buck Johnson wrote in his 150-year history of our church: ***“Once we tread through the darkness of yesteryear, we learn that life in 1860 was filled with good and evil. That is one thing that has not changed. The year gave birth to Lizzie Borden…and Billie the Kid… Annie Oakley…[and] William Jennings Bryan…” who ran for President of the United States three times and lost every single time.***

***“The winds of war were beginning to creep across the country,” Buck wrote, “especially in the southern states. Everyone seemed to have it on their mind and the possibility of a Civil War dominated every move of tongue and pen.”***

***It was into that setting that a missionary woman named Miss Holland “rode into town, igniting the flame to the hopes and dreams of Christians to organize a church… One must feel that God had already found a way to prepare the people of this small coal-mining community for the heartbreak, trouble and tribulation that lay ahead.”***

The history of our church tells us that Miss Holland gathered with five others at the home of George Varner and held a prayer meeting. ***Buck wrote, “They would share a prayer that God would guide them in their pursuit of a place to worship. The scene of that one simple prayer meeting has been the cornerstone of the history of Soddy United Methodist Church.”***

One woman--listening to the voice of the Lord and obedient to the guidance of the Holy Spirit--discovered that God was up to something in this small community. God was preparing the people for the presence of what would become our church. Miss Holland, George Varner, and the others who launched this church—and the women who kept it going during the Civil War when the men went off to fight—had a vision. Through their spyglass, they saw what might be. They didn’t have the resources. They didn’t have the volunteers. They didn’t have the budget. But they did have a God who was with them. They had faith to step forward into something new, unprecedented, risky, uncomfortable--yes, perhaps even dangerous.

But they knew, as is written in Acts 5:39*, “If this program or this work is merely human, it will fall apart, but if it is of God, there is nothing you can do about it—and you better not be found fighting against God!”* If the Holy Spirit wasn’t in it--wasn’t part of it, wasn’t empower it--then it would amount to nothing. But those early pioneers of faith believed God was showing them the future. And they acted on that belief. And you are here—your family has been here for as long as you can remember—because less than a half-dozen people saw with the eyes of faith. Who will be here a hundred years from now because this congregation chose to see with the eyes of faith? Who will look back over generations and say that this has been their church home because the congregation in 2017 was willing to follow God wherever he took them?

Let me share something else Buck wrote: ***“Yes, the 150 years tell us much about our church and ourselves. They tell us that honest and controlled differences of opinion and a strong faith in God have stimulated the progress of the church.”*** As we move forward, we will surely have more honest and controlled differences of opinion; and we shall have to allow our faith to be strengthened if we are going to progress. ***Buck said, “They tell us that it is proper that we occasionally look back over our shoulder at the past, but it is the future, not the past, that hold the dreams of our church.”***

Let me ask you this: do you truly believe that? Do you believe that the future still holds the dreams of this congregation?

I most certainly do, because I know God is never finished with a church until it (a) has fulfilled its purpose and gracefully closes its doors for the final time, or (b) until it rejects the Holy Spirit so often that it becomes nothing more than a husk, a façade, a pretense of what it once was.

That is not us! We are not at either of those places. Therefore, God is not finished with us! He desires to show us a bright new future. It will be a future that is very different from our past, but it must be if we are to carry the torch that was ignited by Miss Holland and others. We face new and different challenges than they did in 1860. But the challenges of time and culture do not hinder God.

I wonder if each of us had our own spyglass, and we looked into the future of our church, what would we see? If, like Elisha, our eyes could be opened to the spiritual realm, what would we see around us, ready to fight for us—to carry us forward? What might be? We are only limited by what we choose—or do not choose—to see. We are only limited by how much we choose to limit God’s power in and through us.

May we have the vision of Elisha to see God’s presence all around us, and may the Spirit grant us lasting fruit and success as we walk toward the new thing that God is doing at Soddy United Methodist Church. Amen.