

What is our great vision?

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The words of Proverbs 29:18--"where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV)--seem appropriate for reflections on Moses's vision of the promised land. Moses was guided by a long-term vision, beginning with his youthful encounter with God in the form of a burning bush. He held the vision of liberation and hope for the Israelites despite the challenges of Egyptian military power and a journey through the wilderness. Moses's vision was unwavering, and it enabled him to work out the details of leadership and nation-building with courage, compassion and flexibility.

I can't help but think about the current American political situation as I ponder Moses's visionary leadership. During the debt-ceiling fight, polarization, inflexibility and acrimony characterized the political debate. Consensus was seen as a sign of weakness. Moreover, decisions are being made both in government and business based on short-term gain rather than long-term sustainability and growth. In this context, I recently heard a political commentator ask the question, "Can America do great things anymore?"

Although visionary thinking and spirituality arise in the context of our present situation, their impact reaches far beyond our lifetimes. We dream and plan for futures we will not experience. Our vision compels us to expect excellence and greatness from ourselves as our gift to the future. In the life of the church, if our vision is only for institutional or congregational survival, we will surely perish. In the life of the nation, if the highest thing we can aspire to is lower taxes or a balanced budget, the nation will fall into decline.

Like Moses, Martin Luther King had a dream: a vision of the beloved community. He recognized that he might not live long enough to see his dream realized. But he pressed on, faithfully planting seeds for future generations. Today, an African American is president of the United States.

What is our great vision? What do we dream of that will take longer than our own lives to achieve? What takes us beyond self-interest to embrace the well-being of the whole earth and the generations that will succeed us?