

Vision Sunday

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 September 2015

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0 : 0 0] Well, again, let me welcome you, especially those of you who are joining us, maybe for the first time or visiting. This is an exciting time in D.C. Typically, September feels like the time when things start to ramp up, when there's more energy.

A lot of people move into the city, start new jobs and internships around this time. So it's always very exciting. So if any of you are new to the city, welcome. We hope this could be a part of you making a great adjustment in finding D.C. to be a home for whatever amount of time that you're here.

Tonight, in the life of our church, of Advent, is a night that we set aside some time to think together about who we are and about why we're here.

The vision, as we articulated at Church of the Advent, is simple. Our vision as a church is to see God's renewal for ourselves, our city, and then the world.

To see God's renewal for ourselves, our city, and our world. And from time to time, we think there's a lot of value in stopping to remember why this vision exists, where it came from, what it means about who we are as a church community.

[1 : 1 4] How it guides and shapes what we seek in our daily lives here. And the question often comes up, where did this vision come from?

Why do we have it? Did we just sit down and kind of make something up because it was alliterative and sounded nice? And maybe that's partially true, but really the answer comes from where we're going to be looking tonight.

The answer is simply this, that our vision is for renewal in ourselves, our city, and our world, because that's how the gospel works. That's how the gospel works. When we talk about the gospel, we talk about the fact that Jesus has come.

He's lived a life on our behalf for us. He's died a death for us, and then he's risen. And that the good news of this changes the world.

And the kind of change that it brings is this world we call renewal. And this is the great promise at the core of our faith, that through Jesus and through the good news, the gospel, God is going to fix what's broken.

[2 : 1 9] He's going to clean and to cleanse the world, and he's going to renew everything that he's made. So the whole reason that our church exists is that we want to be a part of this renewal.

And we want to know what part it is that we play in this renewal and what that looks like in our lives here in Washington, D.C. Because we think it has implications for these neighborhoods, for this city, as it does for the rest of the world.

So it's vitally important that we understand what this renewal is, how it works, what role we play in it. And that's why I want to be looking together tonight at Romans chapter 12. If you have a Bible, you're welcome to open it.

It'll also be up here on the screen. But we're going to be looking at Romans chapter 12. I will say right away, there's a lot going on in this chapter. It's one of the great sections of the Bible, one of the great chapters of the entire Bible, one of my absolute favorites.

There's so much here that I'll just say right away, we're not going to be able to get into all of it. But what we're going to do is use it as a guide to help us understand our identity as a church, and in particular, our vision.

[3 : 25] If you know anything about the flow of Romans, the first 11 chapters is largely theology. This is Paul describing to the Christians in Rome, describing the gospel and its implications.

He does that over 11 chapters. And then in chapter 12, we see that the first verse begins with a therefore. And what that means is we're shifting from theology to implication. Therefore, because of the gospel.

And then you have the beginning of the implications in Romans chapter 12. And what this chapter really gives us is two things about renewal. It shows us the pattern of God's renewal.

And then the part that we play in God's renewal. So the pattern and then the part we play in it. Let's pray for God to help us as we look at this together. Father, we do recognize that our great hope tonight is that you're a God who desires us to know you.

You reveal yourself to us. You've done it primarily through your word and your son. And Lord, we pray that tonight by your power we would be able to move past simply words on a page or human wisdom or thoughts.

[4 : 35] And that we would actually encounter your son. And that we would begin to taste what this kind of renewal means in our lives. As we sit here this evening together, Lord.

And we pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. So first of all, let's look at Romans 12 and what it tells us about the pattern of God's renewal in the world.

If you look at the flow of this chapter, and again, Chandler's going to do the best he can to kind of keep us up. But it's a lot of text to try to cover. If you look at Romans 12, it really breaks down into sort of three sections.

You see verses 1 and 2. And this really shows renewal happening to the individual. Something that happens within us as individuals. And then beginning in verse 3 and going through about verse 8, the focus begins to shift to the church community.

And then beginning in verse 9 and to the end, the focus shifts to the kind of love that Christians have. First within the church. But then in the last section of this chapter, we see the kind of love that Christians have for the world.

[5 : 40] You see this love kind of moving outward beyond the walls of the church. And so what we see is the pattern of renewal is inside out. It's an inside out movement. So imagine a stone dropping into a clear, calm pond.

And the stone hits and you see all these ripples go out from that point of impact. Well, in the Christian faith, the stone is the love of God embodied. Jesus.

We see the love of God take on flesh and drop into the center of history. Into the center of our world. And then you see the ripples begin to go outward. And so that's the pattern that we see here in Romans 12.

It's inside out. So we want to look at this in a little more detail and apply it to our church. And as we go through this, we're going to be thinking about this coming year. 2015, 2016.

What do we want to see happen in the life of Advent between now and this time a year from now? So first of all, we see the love of Jesus renews us individually. Verses 1 and 2.

[6 : 43] Let me ask you this. What's wrong with the world? If I climbed down and you ascended this 20-foot pulpit up here and we gave you 10 minutes to describe what you think is wrong with the world, what would you say?

Right? I mean, D.C. is the kind of place where you come to realize pretty quickly that many, many people here, most people have strong opinions about what's wrong with the world. And how to fix it.

You know, some people say, well, it's poverty and lack of equality and lack of tolerance. Some people say, well, it's behind that. It's lack of education. Lack of education is the real issue.

Some people say it's moral decline. Some people say it's religion. Religion has caused all the major problems in the world. Some people say it's environmental neglect. That's the biggest problem that's going to get us in the end.

Some people say it's corporate greed. But whatever you say, everybody has strong opinions about that question. It's interesting. There was a London newspaper that posted that very question for readers to answer.

[7 : 51] What is wrong with the world? And a Christian writer and thinker named G.K. Chesterton wrote a brief letter in response. So in response to the question, what is wrong with the world, Chesterton wrote, dear sirs, I am sincerely G.K. Chesterton.

And you see that everyone thinks they know what's wrong with the world. Everyone has an opinion. But Christians know, Christians know that the ultimate problem is here.

What's wrong with the world? I am. What's wrong with my marriage? I am. What's wrong? What's the problem that needs to be fixed?

It's not anything out there. Though there are a lot of very real problems, it begins by looking in here. And what we realize is that any real or lasting renewal has to begin with us. When we admit to God that we need to be renewed.

Right before we can be a part of the solution, we have to recognize that we're part of the problem. So Paul says we need to be transformed by what he says is the renewal of our minds.

[9 : 00] Now we could do sermons and sermons and sermons on this. Romans chapter, just these two verses. Martin Lloyd-Jones, I think, preached ten sermons just on this. We're not going to do that.

At least not tonight. But being transformed by the renewal of our minds. In other words, our entire way of thinking needs to change.

Our entire worldview. Our entire way in which we relate to the world. But behind that, the place from which we reason about the world. Not just our reasoning, but the place from which we reason.

Our foundational assumptions. All of that needs to be transformed. So that we are, in Paul's words, shaped less by the world.

Prevailing cultural assumptions that change from culture to culture. And more by the gospel. Because what you begin to realize over time is, especially when you live in a place like Washington, D.C.

[10 : 00] Is that the foundational assumptions of the gospel are radically different. And in some cases, completely opposed to the foundational assumptions of the culture we live in.

I'll give you a couple of examples of this. When we think about identity. The prevailing cultural assumptions about identity. Are this.

That identity is something that I find by looking inside myself. I look within. And by looking within and by a process of self-discovery.

I discover and then express my identity. And the role of my friends, if they're true friends. Is to affirm whatever it is I express.

And how dare you tell me. That what I say about my identity. Is wrong. The role of, if you're my true friend. According to our culture. Then your role is to support.

[11 : 00] My self-discovered identity. That's the prevailing cultural assumption about identity. The gospel is completely opposed to that. The gospel says that our identity, in fact, cannot be discovered by looking within.

It says it's impossible to discover anything about your identity by looking within. The gospel tells us that we discover who we are in relationship with other people. In relationships.

And fundamentally in our relationship with God. Through Jesus Christ. And so the role of our friends is very different. The role of our friends is to pull us out of ourselves.

And to encourage us not to look anywhere other than Jesus to help form our sense of identity. And then our true friends will challenge us when they see us doing that.

They'll push back. You see they're two radically different. And so the question is. Which set of assumptions is forming the way we think and relate to the world? Right? One more example is how we think about freedom.

[12 : 02] The prevailing culture says that freedom is having the ability to choose. That we should be able to choose how we define existence and meaning and life for ourselves.

And what that means is we need to remove anything that restricts our ability to choose freely. Removing restrictions. But the gospel says that the gospel is completely opposite.

It says that freedom is not just having the ability to choose. But to choose well. And by that we mean the ability to choose that for which we were made. To choose to live and to be in accordance with our design.

Like a fish having the freedom to choose to swim in water. Or a bird having the freedom to choose to fly in the air. We talked about this last week for those of you who were here.

So what that means is rather than removing all restriction. Is sometimes we recognize that we need restriction. Right? The banks of a river free that river to be a river rather than a flood.

[13 : 08] It's precisely the limit imposed by the banks that frees the river to be true to its nature. As a river. And we recognize as human beings that there's freedom in that. A river can bring life and beauty and flourishing.

A flood kills and destroys and is lifeless. So how do we define freedom as a church? What set of assumptions is the place from which we reason and relate to the world around us?

I think the way we would apply this to our church is I think one of the biggest reasons that the church as a whole. And Advent in particular. One of the biggest reasons that we are ineffective at bringing renewal.

Is because our thinking is shaped more by the culture than by the gospel. So this year this is going to be a major focus for us. Is looking at the ways our thinking, the ways our assumptions are formed and what they're resting on.

And are they being shaped and formed by the gospel? Or not? So this is the first thing. The love of Christ. The love of Christ enters our lives and begins to change and reshape and transform the entire way we think and relate to the world.

[14 : 21] But then it moves outward. As we said, the ripples begin to move outward. As Christ's love renews us, that love begins to transform the church moving outward. And you see this in verses 3 through 8.

And you notice that at the beginning of verse 3, Paul shifts and he begins to talk about spiritual gifts. So he's talking about love, you know, renewal, being transformed by the renewal of your mind.

Then you may test and approve what God's will is. And then he shifts and he begins to talk about spiritual gifts in verses 3 and 4. And a lot of people look at this and just sort of feel like, is Paul just kind of firing off random thoughts that he forgot to include in his first 11 chapters?

Or maybe he's just shifting to a new topic. He's done with the other one. But if you think about what's happening, actually this is exactly where you should go. This is the logical next thing that he should talk about. We live in a hyper-individualistic society, right?

That's not a controversial thing to say. Maybe the most individualistic society that has ever existed. Our society, right here, right now. But what we see here is that as we are renewed in our thinking, as our thinking is shaped more and more by the gospel than by our culture, the more we're able to see through individualism.

[15 : 31] We're able to see the emptiness of it. The poverty of it. The dead-end nature of it. We begin to hunger for something more than individual autonomy.

We begin to look at the gospel and realize that we were made for more than that. We begin to be captivated by the idea that in Jesus, we become not independent, autonomous beings, but an interdependent community.

An interdependent community. Members of, as Paul says, a living organism, like a human body with different parts. So when Paul starts talking about spiritual gifts, he's saying, as you're renewed in the way you're thinking, you're going to realize that you are parts of the same body, and you each have gifts.

You each have roles that you're meant to play in that body. So this list of gifts is Paul's way of saying, we begin to recognize that we need each other.

Right? That I need you. That you need me. That we need one another. That we're designed to need one another. We're interdependent. And every Christian, as a member of the body of Christ, has a vital role to play.

[16 : 40] And as Paul says in verse 6, having these gifts, what? Let's use them. Let's use it. If you have it, use it. And this is where we begin to see the beauty of the church when it's functioning as it should.

For everyone in this church who has a need, there is someone in this church who has a gift that can meet that need. For everybody who is lonely, there's somebody with a gift of hospitality.

For everybody in this community sitting here right now who has need, there's someone with a gift of mercy. For everyone here who is struggling or hurting, there's someone with a gift of comfort.

For everybody here who lacks understanding, there's someone with a gift of teaching. Right? For everyone here who has a great idea, there's someone who has the ability to know how to make that happen. We're all given gifts.

We're all given as gifts to the church. It's this beautiful image of an interdependent, organic body. So we want to become, over this next year, the kind of church, we want to become more and more the kind of church where every member, every regular attendee, everybody who's a part of our community, is actively involved in the life of our church.

[17 : 54] Where we're not only focused primarily on what we're getting from the church. There's a time and a place to ask that question. But where we're becoming more and more concerned with how we can give to the church and realizing that our most fundamental needs are going to be met in that.

Right? Where we're thinking less and less like consumers and more and more like stakeholders. There's a great opportunity right after the service tonight.

We thought if we were talking about this, we might as well create an opportunity. All of our ministry team leaders, all of our core group leaders, all of our, essentially our leadership is going to be available in this next room.

There's going to be wine. There's going to be refreshments. But the real point of gathering over there tonight is that all of our ministry teams will be represented. They'll have tables. You can go. And if you're new to the church and you've been wanting to know how you can get more involved, you can go.

And pretty much most everything that goes on in the life of our church will hopefully in some way be represented in that room. And you can go and you can talk and ask questions and sign up and figure out ways that you might start to get involved.

[19 : 00] I hope that you will do that. I hope that if you're involved, you'll go and see what else is going on. I hope that if you don't have a role at all in our church other than coming on Sunday, that's great. I hope tonight is the night where you take that next step.

But our vision is to move in the direction of every member ministry. That everybody who's a part of our church is a stakeholder. That we all see that we have a vital role to play.

So this is the second thing. We see individual renewal. Then we see renewal happening in the church. And then as Jesus' love transforms the church, it begins to infuse, as we move through Romans 12, all of our relationships with love.

Both inside the church and outside the church. I mean, if you look at the chapter beginning in verse 9 and onward, you see that love more and more comes to define Christian relationships.

This isn't just a list that begins with love. Everything following verse 9 is an explanation of what kind of love exists in the Christian community. So we see this.

[20 : 03] I mean, let our love be genuine, sincere. Let's be discerning, being able to tell what's right and wrong. A discerning love. Affectionate love. An honoring love.

Outdoing one another in showing honor for one another. Let our love be marked by enthusiasm. By patience. By generosity. Giving to other people who are in need.

By hospitality. A lot of these things are things that we already experience to a great degree in this community. If you've been here for any length of time, you know the incredibly hospitable, generous hearts of people in this church.

You've experienced it firsthand. You know, somebody was just telling me the other day, just the fact that we do care calendars the way we do. They say that's not unique, but the fact that it's entirely organic, spontaneous.

And that when we do a care calendar, it doesn't just go for a couple of weeks, but it'll go for six, eight weeks. And that when we create a care calendar and say we want to take food to somebody who's just had a baby or just gotten out of the hospital, that those things fill up like that.

[21 : 09] And it's like concert tickets selling out. And you know that if you want to kind of get on that list and be one of the people that gets to go over and greet and encourage the person in need, that you better sign up fast.

Because the spots will go. What an amazing problem to have. Our care calendars sell out. That's incredible. This is a huge blessing. And what Paul would say is this is evidence that the love of Christ is bringing about renewal in this community.

Right? But then in verse 14, Paul shifts seamlessly. And you realize, oh, he's not talking about the church anymore. He's talking about the relationship between the church and the larger culture.

He says, bless those who persecute you. He's not talking about Christians. He's talking about how is the church meant to relate to a culture that's hostile toward it. I'd say the prevailing worldview in D.C. would probably be more or less hostile to some of our core beliefs.

That will increasingly be so. It's a good thing in many ways, I believe. But as this shift happens, we see verse 14, 15, 16.

[22 : 18] Look, this is what the renewing love of Christ looks like as it goes out in the world. He says, even if you're persecuted, even if you're slandered, even if you're challenged and opposed, cultivate goodwill.

Bless people. Don't curse them. Bless them. Right? Cultivate empathy. There could be sermons thinking about what it means for us as a church to cultivate empathy for the city we live in.

You know, that we weep when there are tragedies. That we celebrate when there are things to celebrate. That we're involved. That we're invested. That we're not aloof and detached. That we're not only thinking about the end of our internship and the next thing and the next place we're going to live or the part of the world that we work in.

You know? That we're empathizing and investing in and connecting ourselves to the here and now in this city. Verse 16, live in harmony.

Do all that we can to live at peace with the people around us. You know, we rent space from All Souls Unitarian. It's a beautiful building. But it's been identified pretty clearly by them and us.

[23 : 31] And it was before we even agreed to come here and agreed to rent from them. That we are fundamentally at odds on just about every area of belief you can imagine.

And part of what it means for us to cultivate harmony. Is that our entire leadership team is meeting with their entire leadership team. For a series of dinner discussions.

To know more who we're dealing with. To know one another's stories. To understand, to empathize, to connect with one another's communities. And it's been an incredibly humbling experience.

And it will continue to be. Verse 16 says actually humility. That we should cultivate humility. That we should never think ourselves above anyone or anything. Right?

We're not too good for anything. So here we have this comprehensive vision of renewal. This love that comes like a stone into a pond and then begins to ripple outward.

[24 : 30] And this love going out as goodwill, as empathy, as harmony and humility into the larger community. And we have this comprehensive vision of renewal. We're renewed individually.

Then the church is renewed. Then the greater community is renewed. And you see that the church begins to operate more and more like a body. Like an organism. This interdependence happens. And then that love begins to radiate outward.

Even to people who might persecute us. And so this leads us to sort of our final question for tonight. This is a grand vision. It's a beautiful vision. How is it possible? What makes all of this possible?

How do we do it? So this brings us to this question. What part do we play in God's renewal? Very important question. We could simply focus on what we do.

Right? We could focus on making sure we have all the right programs. We could focus on our initiatives. And there's a place for that. There's a lot going on in our church.

[25 : 28] Right? I mean, one of our central visions is we plant churches that plant churches that plant churches. So in a month, on November 1st, we'll be launching another worship community in Brooklyn.

And for now, until it's released to become its own church, it's going to be called Advent Brooklyn. It's going to be an extension of everything that happens here. It's going to be happening in the morning in Brooklyn.

In a space that belongs to the Catholic University of America. It's right there next to the metro. November 1st, that's launching as a part of this vision to plant churches. In addition, we support church planting in Mobile, Alabama.

In Chicago. In Boston. In Salisbury, England. In the Arab Gulf region. All churches that want to plant churches that want to plant churches.

All churches that share this vision of renewal. So that's a big part of what we do. We also have two sister churches that share this vision right here in the city. Church of the Resurrection on Capitol Hill and Church of the Ascension out in Arlington.

[26 : 34] We also promote gospel reconciliation through something called the As We Forgive Rwanda Initiative. For years now, this has been an initiative in schools and prisons and churches all over Rwanda.

Promoting reconciliation based in the gospel between victims and perpetrators of the 1994 genocide. That's still going on. Something that we support. The reconciliation, not the genocide.

The reconciliation. We have church-wide initiatives that we're a part of. Sometimes multi-church initiatives. One of the great ones that you all need to know about, and hopefully you do, is DC 127.

It's a partnership with a number of churches in the city. And the vision is to take the waiting list of kids right here in the city who need foster care. Or kids who need to be adopted. And that Christians would become so involved in this that we would reduce that waiting list down to zero.

And there are so many ways to get involved in this. Not only by becoming a foster family or by adopting. But by playing one of the myriad roles that you can play to support families who do this.

[27 : 39] Right? So this is a great initiative. We also serve in a number of ways locally through our core groups. We have smaller communities. Like small groups that meet all around the city. And many of them are actively involved in serving in the community.

This is the place where discipleship happens in our church. And the place where mission happens. So you have a core group that's focused on racial reconciliation. You have a core group that's focused on engaging and serving relocated refugees as they come into the city.

And they have very limited resources. Also we have a community called Mothers of Preschoolers. That exists just to reach out to and to serve and to build community for stay-at-home moms.

Because that's a very isolating experience. We engage culture with the gospel through all kinds of things. But one of the latest is the Science and Faith series that we did a couple of years ago.

You may remember it. I think back in 2013 we did a series where we brought together leading scientists and theologians and philosophers. And we explored questions about what it means to be human from a scientific and a theological standpoint.

[28 : 45] And the goal was to show that science and faith are not at odds. And in fact, in many ways, they're incredibly complementary. This is one of the ways that we engage culture. And by the way, in partnership with the Trinity Forum and with BioLogos and with the Templeton Foundation, we're going to begin a new series of this next year.

We'll do two events in 2016 and two events in 2017. Same vision, same goal. It's called Discovery and Doxology. So you'll hear more about that. But all of these are things that we do.

And it would be easy as a church to say we want to see renewal. And so therefore we've got to do. We've got to do more. We've got to have more programs. We've got to be more active. Lord knows there's the need.

But if we do that, if we focus simply on the doing, we miss the whole point. The entire key to understanding our part in God's renewal comes in Romans 12, verse 1.

He says, So what Paul's saying is pretty simple.

[30 : 00] It's pretty clear. And yet it's pretty profound. He's saying, Do you want to be renewed yourself and have a gospel-shaped perspective? Do you want to be a part of a church that is being renewed, that is experiencing this love in a way that is transforming us, knitting us together as a body?

Do you want to be a part of the kind of church where that love radiates out and has an impact on the entire city? And through the ministries that we support, other parts of the world. Do you want to be a part of that?

Then offer yourself. Offer yourself. He's saying the sacrifices that you've seen in your life at this day and time, they were dead sacrifices.

You'd put the sacrifice on the altar, you'd kill it, and then you'd go home. He says, But we're called to be something entirely different. Living sacrifices. Your whole life, day in and day out, the most mundane activities of your daily life, offered as offerings on the altar.

Life lived on the altar. He says, Give yourself freely to him. There's a preacher, an old Welsh preacher named Dr. David Martin Lloyd-Jones, and he preaches on, he's the one that preached ten sermons on this.

[31 : 18] But in one of those, he tells this story about a doctor, a fellow doctor, that he got to know, and this doctor told him a story about his dog. He said, Every day I go and I take my little dog, this little gray dog, on a walk through the same park, down the same path, every day.

And he says, Every time I walk this dog, this dog is constantly straining at the end of the leash, just pulling and pulling and pulling and pulling, and maybe you have a dog like this. And pulling and pulling and pulling, and this is in the days before the dog whisperer.

And so, he didn't know what to do, and he said, One day he just couldn't take it anymore, and he finally decided, I know the dog, the dog knows the path, I'm just going to trust this, and he lets the dog off the leash.

And he says, The dog is gone. Just takes off into the woods, like a lightning bolt, gone. And he just stands there for a few minutes, and realizes the dog's not coming back.

And then he decides he's just going to keep walking down the path. And about ten minutes later, from the other direction, this gray lightning bolt goes, and it comes up right to his leg.

[32 : 26] He doesn't know where the dog's been, it's been about ten, fifteen minutes. But the dog falls in step right beside him, just behind him, and finishes the walk right at his heel. And he says, From that moment on, he never had to use the leash again, that the dog walked right along beside him, every day when they went on the walk.

And so, Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, Do you recognize what happened there? The dog offered himself, to his master, freely. The master took the leash off, and the dog was given the opportunity, to offer himself.

And that's what he did. And that's what Paul's talking about here. It's voluntary. I urge you. He doesn't say, I command you. He says, I urge you. Offer yourself. Offer yourself to the master.

Because he died, he has taken you off the leash. He set you free from sin and death. You're free. You're liberated. Now you have the opportunity, to offer yourself. And this, God ultimately doesn't bring renewal, through programs and initiatives.

He brings renewal, through people who are completely yielded to him. That's the very core of this. And so, this is my hope and prayer, for my own life.

[33 : 38] As I seek and desire to become a, a better servant of you all. It's also, it's also my prayer, my continual prayer for the life of our church, especially over this coming year, 2015, 2016.

If there's one way, I believe that we as a church need to grow, more than any other way. It's not numerically, it's not financially, it's not strategically. Listen, let me just, I'll be frank with you.

The way that we most need to grow, is in our willingness, to offer more, and more of our lives, freely, and joyfully, as living sacrifices.

And if there's nothing else, that we focus on this year, I hope and pray, that we grow, in our ability, to offer ourselves, to Jesus. And the reason is simple, it's because, as Paul says here, this is the only possible response, we can have, to the mercy, and the grace, of Jesus Christ.

Who gave himself up, as a sacrifice for us, with joy. So as we consider, our vision together, and as we move, into this year together, as we consider this vision, to see God's renewal, for ourselves, our city, and our world, let us, offer ourselves, as a community, to the one, who offered himself, joyfully, for us.

[35 : 09] Let's pray. Our Father, we recognize, even as Paul surely does, that, this is not something, that can come naturally, it's not the product, of the force of will, it's not a, it's not a, purely human decision, but this is something, that requires, the power of your spirit, in our innermost being.

Would, plant your love, so deeply in us, that it would begin, to radiate out, from the center of our being, and that through your spirit, we would be renewed, and that through that renewal, this community, would become, a haven, and that it would become, a beacon, of your love, for this city.

We pray this, in your son's holy name. Amen.