

Grace Presbyterian Church, Orleans
“2020 Vision”
Revelation 21: 1 - 6
Pastor Jonathan

December 29, 2019
Sunday before New Year’s

Questions:

The end of the year is a time to express what we have liked in the last year, and to do better in the New Year. Would you like to share something from 2019 for which you praise God?

When we look backwards in time in our lives, we call it “hindsight.” When we look forward in time we call it “foresight.” But when we speak of today, in the future, we look for vision. Seeing rightly. Vision that optometrists call 20-20 vision. The American Optometric Association tells us: “**20/20 vision** is a term used to express normal visual acuity (the clarity or sharpness of vision) measured at a distance of 20 feet. If you have 20/20 vision, you can see clearly at 20 feet what should normally be seen at that distance. If you have 20/100 vision, it means that you must be as close as 20 feet to see what a person with normal vision can see at 100 feet.”*

This describes normal vision. Of course, as we enter the New Year, and the new decade, we want God’s vision for our lives which is by definition extraordinary vision. How many of us will be alive at the end of the decade? That’s not to scare you, but to motivate us all to want better vision for our lives. When I welcomed Boaz here on Christmas Eve (Boaz is my grandson), I noted he will be 21 in 2040. I thought to myself, will the Christianity we practice today be legal in Canada in that year? It is quite something to assert that the Scriptures are true and reveal God’s will throughout the ages. It is astonishingly strong to say the Way to God is only through Jesus as He says, “No one comes to the Father, except through me...” (John 14: 6) That is not a relativistic statement. It establishes a truth. Many say that wars and conflict are based on this line of thinking. What will Canada legislate on such matters in the future? What do you think? I’d like to believe that religious freedoms will continue, but then they are often balanced with individual rights, or anti-religious freedoms. We shall see. This is not just about marriage, or sexual rights. It is about freedom to

* <https://www.aoa.org/patients-and-public/eye-and-vision-problems/glossary-of-eye-and-vision-conditions/visual-acuity>

assemble and assert truth. We know today that many countries in the world have outlawed such assemblies, or gravely restricted them. Christianity seems to do very well as an underground religion.

I remember the story of the former Soviet Union, where a house church had been meeting with a significant number of people, certainly over 50 maybe more. And all of a sudden the door gets flung open and a KGB officer with a sub machine gun enters the room. Have I told you this story? He gives the believers a chance to take in the fact that he is there, he tells them to get up against the wall and then says, I will give you two minutes, all of you who don't really believe in Jesus can leave this place and the rest of you will face the consequences. Make your decision now. Some quickly, but mostly slowly, well over half the group leaves the meeting. The officer announces that he will give people one more chance to give up on this religious stuff about Jesus or face the consequence. A few more leave. After they leave, he locks the door, he takes off his hat and coat and lays down his gun. He speaks to the people, "I wanted to know who the true believers were, so I could worship with them."

Now this story illustrates a truth that has likely happened in many countries, not just the former Soviet Union. It is a way to talk about our faith in a time where the government may not like what we believe. What would you have done in their position?

We need vision from God to go forward into the future, no matter what that future looks like. Without such vision, we simply guess and try to find our way. With such vision, we can be given the courage to face any trials and any challenges that come our way.

This year coming we particularly need healthy vision from God, so I am calling it 20/20 vision. And I've been waiting for decades to name this sermon because of the year's number 2020... And where better to look for vision from God than from the book of Revelation. There we find the apostle John writing about the end of the world, that the old world has passed away.

The Good News from Revelation 21 is that there is a new heaven and a new earth. This is not just a teaching from Revelation, it can be found in 2 Peter 3: 7-13 and alluded to in Romans 8: 18-21. Peter teaches that the old earth will burn. John simply says that the new earth will have a great city large

enough for all, and that there will be no sea. Remember that the sea in Revelation is the place where the Beast, the anti-Christ comes from and his colleague, the second Beast, who represents the first. The threat of the sea is gone from the city. The proportion of water to land is not the point of this teaching.

And the point of the city being built by God, that is, “coming down from heaven,” is that it is not your usual city. It is God’s city where Jesus’ bride can live in peace and harmony. It is a place God Himself can and will live. It is the fulfillment of all the promises and covenants of God, where His very presence gives all we need. Our light comes from Him. Our sustenance comes from Him. (Revelation 21: 22-27 and 21:6))

And it will be a place of healing from the past. So likely there will be some memory of this life. I’m not sure of all that will transfer from this life to the next. But God clearly says through John that our tears will not pursue us into that city. They will be completed, wiped away. No more death. No more mourning. No more pain. So now we are speaking of a life without endings, without hurting, wounding and anguish. Loss itself will be lost.

And John tells us that the old order of things has passed away. This is a summary statement of a life we can barely imagine. There will be time and a different, unbroken dynamic between its residents and between them and the Lord. There will be a new physics or perhaps a new interaction between the dimensions that are currently cut off from one another. Jesus, who is seated on the throne says that He is making all things new. Since He is the Creator, He has the ability to make it new, and is doing so. (Col. 1: 16)

Lest people cannot imagine the world ending and a new world beginning with a great city, then listen to Jesus’ words, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Jesus will accomplish this new reality, that we look to forward to as heaven, the place of God’s dwelling. The place that we have a small taste of now as we trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. As we agree with the truth of the Scripture in this regard, we promise to agree to the whole of the truth of the Scripture and ask for God’s help to hear and obey His Word.

Jesus even now gives us the water of life, that springs from His very self. He is the Alpha and Omega. Jesus is: the true Alpha who is the truest leader, the source of life, the Faithful Author of Life, the beginning of the

first creation, the beginning of the new creation... Jesus is the true Omega: the end and righteous judge of all that is so disturbing and unjust and broken in this life. He will rightly bring it to an end. There is a list that is hard to read in Rev. 21 in the verses after verse 6. But these things said are true. We must be courageous in following Jesus and not give up on Him, believing and trusting Him, not pursuing evil, or the destruction of others, or sexual immorality, or the practice of magic arts, or idolatry or just lying to ourselves and others. These will disappear and be done with in that life.

But there is a difference between perfection in all these areas and holding on firmly to any one of them or multiple ones. Jesus does not look for perfection but a willing heart to hear Him and accept His way.

The city is a place of healing and reconciliation. It is a place to get to know God personally, beyond what we have known in this life. But that life builds on this life. And so what can we do now as we enter another new year, and look to trust Jesus for a new decade and a new life?

We affirm that the only way forward is by trusting Jesus and His Word. We affirm that the only place of hope, peace, joy and love is in Jesus' presence. We affirm that we only exist as an outpost and hospital for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments of our Lord are necessary, reliable and essential to our salvation, relationship and walk with God. We affirm this place as a place where sinners are welcome, and people of all backgrounds can come to know Jesus. We too know our own brokenness and we strive to be better followers of Jesus, for the sake of the world we serve, and most of all, for Jesus' sake.

Even more than fighting for the environment of the world that will pass away, these things are primary.

May God grant us the courage to see a vision of Jesus in this coming year, so He remains the centre and core of why we exist. He is our 20/20 vision.

Let us pray.