

Readings: Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22 – 22:5; John 14:23-29

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” (Proverbs 29.18; KJV)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Visions are everywhere in the readings for today. Paul has a vision in the first reading from Acts which sends him to Macedonia to help a woman by the name of Lydia (albeit through a few other towns with hard to pronounce names). Or take the vision of our second reading from Revelation – a vivid vision of the city of God coming down “from heaven to earth” – a vision, we might say, of the impossible becoming reality.

Or the gospel reading’s hopeful vision, hopeful promise that on the heels of Jesus’ death and resurrection the Holy Spirit will come and teach us, remind us of the original words, the original vision of Jesus. Even the psalm for today might be a vision of sorts with its hopeful promise that “God [would] be gracious to us and bless us and make God’s face shine upon us.”

And so, this Sixth Sunday of Easter, this Ninth day of May, 2010, this Mother’s Day, this confirmation Sunday... I want to talk about *vision* [and Brennan, now that I know that you’re timing me, I will do my best to keep it to 12-15 minutes].

The last time I got my eyes checked wasn’t that long ago. You probably know and remember how it works. You sit there in the comfortable recliner as that big apparatus with the long arm is put in front of you and then they smash it up against your face. And as the vision doctor hones in closer and closer to your prescription, as the vision is sharpened, the farther down on the vision chart you get, the more difficult it is to see clearly.

[Confirmands, parents, grand-parents and god-parents, family members,] Brothers and sisters in Christ, life is a little like this, isn’t it? How easy it is to lose sight or to forget the vision that God has laid out before us. As we navigate the choices of life, even as we grow deeper into the complexities of life, how difficult it can be to forget or to lose sight of the things that God would have us see clearly – like those in need.

“I used to just think that if you believed in God, you would go to heaven,” said one of [you/the confirmation students] in [your/their] faith paper this week. *“Over the years though I’ve learned you don’t just have to believe in him, but you also have to live up to his will. And as hard as we may try, none of us are perfect so it’s a good thing God is a forgiving God.”* Of course, I could have taken words from any of [your/the] papers, but for whatever reason these are the words that this week have been a vision to me.

Now, I know that at least a couple of our confirmation students [those/you who will affirm their/your baptismal promises] this morning are athletes. Well, one of the prophets in the bible (the one with, I think, one of the best names in the whole bible: Habakkuk) puts things in athletic terms. He writes, “Then GOD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.”

I envision this towering wall with words, with a vision, painted so big and so plain you can’t miss it even if you’re sprinting by for your life (like the top line of a vision chart).

So let’s talk about the vision plainly written in bible. Take, for example, one of the most familiar, perhaps the most plainly written vision in the whole bible: John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that everyone who *believes in him* may not perish but may have eternal life.”

But how easy it is to forget, to lose sight of the fact that the life of Jesus, taken as a whole, was more about giving a promise, and less about making a demand. We could probably say the same of the bible.

But anyone who’s taught a confirmation or Sunday School class (or any class for that matter) knows how easy it can be to twist the hopeful promise of God’s love into a demand, to turn the vision of God inside-out and instead of sharing good news, making it sound like a requirement.

It’s all too easy, to heap on the laws and rules by the shovel-full until the vision, the promise is practically buried. To take, for example, the second reading and in trying to share the good news that God has promised to bring God’s kingdom (the city of God) to this earth, to somehow put it back to us and make it sound like we have to do something to make it happen – whether it’s believe or do God’s will; whether it is thinking the right way or acting the right way.

We do it for good reason, of course. And we've got a good excuse. It's like when you have a bite of something really good and you want share it. So you get a heaping spoonful and you can't help yourself, you shove it in the face of a nearby friend and say, "Try it, this is great! You'll love it!" And somewhere between our vocal cords and the ear of the friend, the gift is twisted into a demand.

Then again, let's be honest, sometimes you just walk into the classroom in the same way that you walk into life and you're going to try to convey the immensity of God's love that you feel with every fiber of your body, mind and soul.

You've got it all planned, but before you know it life walks over you, things don't go how you expect them to, your plan falls apart and you find yourself blurting out, not even for a very justified reason, "Kenneth – stop talking to Chase! Myles and Sierra – get down from there! Rachel and Brennan – put down those *pruning shears!*" (I am just kidding, none of this really happened in this year's confirmation class).

But the vision. It's so easy to get side-tracked, to forget. It's so easy to lose sight of it. This week, I keep remembering (maybe it's the Holy Spirit, just like Jesus promises in the gospel reading for today), I keep being drawn back to the words in that faith paper: *I used to just think that if you believed in God, you would go to heaven. Over the years though I've learned you don't just have to believe in him, but you also have to live up to his will. And as hard as we may try, none of us are perfect so it's a good thing God is a forgiving God.*

Belief in God. Action, doing God's will... *And as hard as we may try, well, it's a good thing God is a forgiving God.* It's so easy to forget the vision. It's so easy to lose sight of the fact that, for example, in the vision from Revelation, our second reading for today, it's not about us "going away to heaven." It is about God's kingdom coming here and God choosing to dwell with us, always; and it's about a life of fulfillment and abundance, a community whose gates are wide open, and a world whose nations come together and have no need of war anymore. A world where all are satisfied.

Not that Mother's Day is part of the church calendar, but on this day when we remember and give thanks for the gift that mothers can be, let me put the vision in personal terms – when I was young (between five and ten years old) I started getting terrible migraine headaches. If you've ever had a

migraine you know how excruciating light and sound can be. So I would lay on the bathroom floor because it was the only room in our house without any windows and it was quiet. And I remember my mother would hold my head in her lap with a cold wash cloth pressed against my forehead and whisper, over and over again, “God is love... God is love... God is love...”

“But...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you...Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” How’s that for a promise? How’s that for a vision written plainly?

In just a little while, we will affirm promises that have already been made. We will ask six young adults if they “intend to continue in the covenant God made with them in baptism” (as if they had a choice):

to live among God’s faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

I say, “as if they had a choice” because when God makes a covenant, when God makes a promise, when God sets a vision clearly before us, make no mistake, it’s a done deal. Of course, we can always do what my two year old son does from time to time. I’ll say to him, “I love you, Elijah.” And every once in awhile (I think just to test me) he says, “No!” As if he had a choice in the matter.

It doesn’t mean that the promises that these six young adults will make or the promises that the people of God make today “to support these sisters and brothers and pray for them in their life in Christ” aren’t desperately important.

But remember the vision... *as hard as we may try, none of us are perfect so it’s a good thing God is a forgiving God.*

It’s a good thing, indeed. Let us give thanks for the God of love, the God of peace. And for those times when we have a crystal clear vision of this God.

Amen.