

FIRST LESSON: Acts 16:9-15
SECOND LESSON: Revelation 21:10, 22-22-5
THE GOSPEL: John 14:23-29

The Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 26, 2019

“Resurrection Vision”
Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell Nelson
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

I usually don’t do this, but I’m going to start with a good joke. Actually it’s very touching. An anonymous couple were listening to my sermon, and as they were together, the wife gently laid her head on her husband’s shoulder and fell asleep. How deeply tender. It awoke the husband, who was already asleep! So, I want to thank Pastor Wally Klandrud for that. I’m keeping an eye on him today. I feel like I’m at home when I get my pastor friends teasing me on that.

It is a great joy to proclaim the Gospel to you, and I hope this will be an encouragement to you. It’s about vision. It’s about the resurrection vision that allows us to see and be called with the unique confidence that our fears and our confusion are set aside because God calls us forward into the future. I pray that these words are of encouragement to you.

I was struck by the word “vision” because of the Acts 16th chapter. During the night, Paul had a vision. Vision is a word that’s been used for organizations. For the church, vision often means a calling; a calling to ministry, a calling from God to move forward in faith. Paul had this vision that he saw someone in Macedonia, in Greece, far away from where he was, pleading with him to come over to Macedonia and help us. This was a dream, a very tangible and specific dream, a calling dream. When he saw this vision, it touched his heart. I’m going to move into the vision for our work together.

I’ve been here for eight months now; can you believe it? So if you had an “over” or “under” bet . . . I am so looking forward to these years ahead. I was so motivated by our 50th anniversary coming up in January of 2025, and that will be a time of great celebration. But, for myself, our future is not yet so clear, at least to me. What is it that we will be called forward into ministry for? That will be our work next year as a congregation to work together, to discern from God where God is calling us. I’m going to label it for right now, “2020 vision.” It will be a nice play on words; it will be 2020 next year and we’ll see how God calls us forward in ministry, but it will set the course of our direction. What do we want to be known for?

Paul had a sense of the heart, and I think any congregation that has a God-honoring vision touches your heart. This is a congregation that seeks to be kind and caring. Caring ministry here is so significant. There’s a sense of enthusiasm and encouragement. I know that will be our future, to be caring and enthusiastic and releasing those gifts and talents in our people. I’ve heard of Sun City being called the “City of Volunteers.” Have you heard that? It’s interesting being here now because I hear a little bit of hesitation—will it continue? Do you think it will continue,

that Sun City is the City of Volunteers? Yes, by the help of God. Right? This church can be one of those hallmarks to where people are called forward to use their gifts and their talents and to be a place of encouragement. What's so interesting is that people don't really realize they have the gifts, they don't see the pathway forward. That will be part of our journey to understand how we do that.

This vision that Paul had—the words here—“he had a vision.” Then a pronoun is put in. It goes from “he” to “we.” It goes from “he had seen a vision” to “we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia.” That is difficult and beautiful work of vision work where you see God's call for the future going from a small group, perhaps a single person, to a larger group. The word “we.” It's one of the great gifts of being a part of church where “we” are able to respond to a common vision for our future.

I share a little personal story for you. First, I want to thank you. For those who are guests I perhaps made a mistake in telling the congregation that I wanted to lose weight. So, now I have a lot of people observing my habits. One of the best ones was I had a cookie (which is great improvement for me—“a cookie” is really good for me!) and I saw someone saying “Oh Pastor!” That wasn't as encouraging as perhaps you meant, but it is that joy of being part of a community and being accountable that I enjoy about this. So, I'm going to share a quick story about “vision”, that someone sees something and is calling me forward into this vision.

The person is a very nice man, and he saw a vision. So, Marv Winters, thank you Marv. He cast a vision for me, and he looked at me several months ago and said, “As I run my 100th marathon (he's at 83 marathons now!), I will join him in my first. So, you don't see it either, do you? (congregational laughter!!!) So, we're at this difficult point of a vision. I, meaning him, is trying to use the new pronouns, “we.” It can seem daunting. I have tried to do this before when I was 45, and I did not achieve it, but I ran a 22-mile run and kind of tweaked my knee and wasn't able to pull it together a few weeks later for the race. I have some memories. Part of vision work is in our previous failures or mistakes. If God sets a vision for you, do not let your past determine your future.

We start fresh here at this church. The forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of Christ, the truth that we know and whose care we have and where we are going to be with the Lord forever allows a certain confidence. I'm not quite there with the “we” yet, Marv. I have to admit that. But, I did take a tangible first step and I bought running shoes, and socks. Is there anything left? One part of a vision is that it seems really big, 26.2 miles, and it is. The next encouragement for me was when I run, run for two mailboxes, then walk for two mailboxes. Run for two, walk for two. Does that make sense? That's harder than it sounds. I'm sharing that, but I'm sharing going from a small group to a larger group is the tension for life and faith. Simply put, I have to learn whether I can trust Marv or not? I know I can.

Trust is the key here. Where God sets in our future, what God is calling us to—the words in the Gospel text are a great impact for our congregation and for your life and my life. Jesus says this for the future, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. My peace I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” These words are so beautiful. Peace. We would translate that from the Greek into the Hebrew into “shalom' or

Arabic “shalam” and to me I would translate that into English as “wholeness” or “wellness” where all the parts are working together for the common good, where you and I are feeling whole. It’s one of the great things about being in this congregation. Each one of us brings our own optics together, synoptics, together seeing the Gospel of Jesus Christ put into our midst. Each one of us bringing this sense of wholeness and encouragement is one of the callings that God has for us. We will see something spectacular when we bring this wholeness to our community.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. This Greek word could be translated “agitated”, “going back and forth.” Are you like me that when you’re trying to make a move, “on one hand it should be this way, but on the other hand it’s this way. Wait. It could be this way.” That’s what this word means. Don’t let your heart be troubled. Don’t go back and forth. Be at ease. Don’t let them be afraid.

Our future is shaped by the start of this church. I’m excited about the 50th anniversary and starting to read some of our historical documents. One of the insights that comes out of this is that we have some people that were here at the beginning. We need to get their stories recorded so we have that part of our history here because time will march on. Pastor Elmer Hjortland, his nickname among pastors was, I believe, “Shorty”—probably a term of endearment! One of the things that struck me was that on the day before the first worship service, he sent a letter to a young person. This young person heard him preach back in the Midwest where Pastor Hjortland lived previously.

This is dated, January 4, 1975.

“Dear Friend Scott: You might think I have forgotten all about you, but we have moved to Sun City, Arizona, where I am establishing a church. The prospects are very good to start a church here. (Isn’t that a beautiful sense of confidence). I hope that you are doing well in school. Please write to me about yourself. I am going to be back in Minneapolis. Let’s meet so that I might encourage you. May the Lord bless you and give you a blessed new year!” (There’s a sense of confidence here. During this time, letters had gone to the community inviting people to the first worship service in the Social Hall west of Sundial Rec. Center at 11:30 a.m. This encouragement from Pastor Hjortland that he will minister to your spiritual needs if you have no church affiliation.) “This fine 4.2 acre building site (where ALC is now located, and this statement) “The success of our endeavors today indicate that our congregation will quickly grow in size. The enthusiastic ladies of our group (and that continues doesn’t it—enthusiasm means God within, in theos, God is within forming this beautiful community). “This will be the newest church in our wonderful community. The first church with a building site north of Bell Road!”

I’ve made a copy of another document (Pastor shows the document) which was when the church site was being created in the first couple of years. The vision for the church and for the building of this sanctuary was to “add life to our years.” It will be our encouragement through the Holy Spirit to add life to our years, to determine a call forward that is motivating, God-honoring, that allows us to be of encouragement and generosity, to continue this marvelous ride known as American Lutheran Church.

Let me end with the phrase from Revelation, as John was in the spirit, was seeing this vision of the beauty of the angel showing the river of the water of life. Bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side is the Tree of Life, with its 12 kinds of fruit, producing fruit each month. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. There will be no more night, there will be no more need for lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be our light. This beauty, this direction, this calling home provides a resurrection security that we know where we are going and the opportunity here in which to move forward is a tremendous gift from God.

I now want to speak personally. As I wrestle with my commitment with my friend Marv, in your own life, if God is calling you forward to a new portion of ministry or to move forward out of old habits, or whatever it may be for you, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. God wants wholeness for your life, and God gives a peace beyond all understanding. Don't let your heart be agitated going back and forth, but trust. Do not be afraid. This is the gift that we have to give to our community, this blessed nature known as the church.

I want to end with the understanding that we have in our opening invocation. As we come to worship in these moments, Lord, remind us of the privileges we enjoy as your people, to confess our sins, to receive and give forgiveness, to pray and to sing and to listen, to renew our fainting spirits, to rest in all your promises. This is God's purpose for us, and the call forward is as unique and personal as my call for health, for your call for the love of your family and this community. I look forward to the discernment of 2020 vision, and I give thanks to God to do it together. Amen.