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Easter 6

Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

So sisters and brothers, I want to speak today about the word "vision."

And the word "vision" is a word we use, of course, to speak about the health of our eyes.

We go to an optometrist, and the optometrist evaluates our vision, evaluates how well we see.

If a person has perfect eyesight, they are said to have 20/20 vision.

A person with perfect vision sees objects clearly from 20 feet away as most people do from 20 feet away.

If a person has less than perfect vision, they may be evaluated as having 20/40 or 20/60 vision.

A person with less than perfect vision can see objects clearly from 20 feet away, which most people see clearly from 40 or 60 feet away.

And some people actually have better than 20/20 vision, say 20/15 or 20/10 vision.

In other words some people can see objects clearly at 20 feet away, where most people see those same objects clearly at 15 or 10 feet away.

So, this is one meaning of the word "vision." It is a word used with respect to the health of our eyes to literally see things.

PAUSE

But, there is another definition of the word "vision."

Another definition of "vision" is something seen in a dream or a trance.

And it is this definition of "vision" that can be applied to our readings today from Acts and Revelation.

In Acts 16, it says, "During the night Paul had a vision..."

Paul was in all likelihood sleeping. And so Paul was dreaming in his sleep.

It was after all nighttime, so says our reading.

"During the night Paul had a vision..."

PAUSE

And again from Revelation 21, we read that John also had a vision.

In fact, the book of Revelation is filled with one vision after another vision, after another vision.

Only John may not be asleep when he is having all these visions, as much as he is in some kind of trance.

But again, here is a second understanding of that word, "vision."

A "vision" is something seen in a dream or trance.

PAUSE

But there is still another definition of "vision."

And this third definition of "vision" is the ability to foresee or imagine some prospect, some new reality.

This third definition of "vision" is future-oriented.

And someone who has visions of the future is someone who is said to be prophetic, that is, that one is like a prophet.

He or she is said to be a visionary.

And that someone who has visions of the future, and who then voices their vision of the future, is said to have a prophetic voice.

And probably the single most powerful prophetic voice of the last century was Martin Luther King, Jr.

His "I have a Dream" speech would definitely be described as prophetic.

That speech by King looks to the future. King's speech imagines a new reality.

That speech is a vision, and Martin Luther King, Jr. was a visionary.

PAUSE

Another prophetic voice, aside from Martin Luther King, Jr....

Another prophetic voice, again from the 20th century, is that of Carl Sagan.

If we don't know, Carl Sagan was an astronomer, planetary scientist, cosmologist, and so on.

He died in 1996.

And, contrary to our usual understanding of vision, Sagan's vision, his imagination of a new reality is rather gloomy.

He warned of nuclear annihilation, AND he warned as well of our planet's demise from environmental impacts.

He based his latter vision on his observations of other planets.

For example, Venus, it was discovered is a planet suffering from the effects of the Green House effect.

And Mars, it was discovered has no appreciable ozone layer, and so the harmful rays radiate the surface constantly, making life all but impossible.

And so it was Carl Sagan who said the destruction of our own planet could go the way of Venus or Mars.

That was his vision, his warning of a new reality.

PAUSE

So, there are several definitions of this word "vision":

The health and power of our eyes to literally see.

The images we have during a dream or trance.

The ability to see in the future, the ability to imagine a new reality for good or for bad.

PAUSE

And it is this third understanding of "vision"...

It is this third definition of “vision” that I want us to think about today.

For, in our gospel reading for today, Jesus is imagining a different reality.

There in the Gospel of John, Jesus is seeing into the future.

He is envisioning a time when the Spirit will come upon the people of God.

Jesus is envisioning a time when he will no longer be with his disciples.

He will ascend to God the Father.

But, God will not leave God’s people orphaned.

God the Father will send the Spirit to teach and remind us of the words of Jesus.

This is the new reality, Jesus envisions, for us.

This is Jesus’ vision—a reality in which the Spirit permeates our world.

Indeed, Jesus is embodying in our Gospel reading a prophetic voice—he is the voice of a prophet, a voice that is future-oriented.

Jesus is a visionary.

PAUSE

Now today, we are hard pressed to name a person or persons who speak with a prophetic voice.

Where are the people today who are envisioning a new reality?

Where are the persons today who are speaking with a voice that is future-oriented?

And I am not just speaking about a voice that tells us the facts.

There are scientists a-plenty who can wax on about the facts of global warming.

There are scientists a-plenty who can expound on the threats to human life, the result of a warming planet.

There are scientists a-plenty who can describe what is on the horizon if we don’t reduce our use of carbon rich fuels.

And there are politicians a-plenty who can tell us what may happen if we don't stand up to autocratic governments.

There are politicians a-plenty who can explain what will happen to democracy if we don't respond to aggression toward peaceful democratic nations.

And there are sociologists who can spell out what might happen to our country if we don't get a handle on hate crimes and racial prejudice.

There are sociologists who can describe the consequences of a nation that continues to fight over the rights of women to make decisions about their own bodies.

There are all sorts of voices in society, responding to all sorts of issues, explaining what reality may look like.

There are all sorts of voices, trying to help us envision the future.

But, even so, we are hard pressed to name a prophetic voice in our present day.

We are hard pressed to name a contemporary voice that truly inspires.

A contemporary voice that truly galvanizes our society.

A contemporary voice that is truly prophetic, that is resounding with truth and justice.

A voice that is honored, and respected above all other voices.

It is hard to name a person or persons whose voice fills that criteria.

It is hard to find a voice that makes us passionately believe in the message it carries.

PAUSE

But to truly BELIEVE in a voice that inspires—that is what the world needs.

That is what the world has always needed.

We need voices that compel us to BELIEVE.

Jesus says, in our gospel reading, "And I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may BELIEVE."

Jesus tells us that God the Father will send the Spirit, so that when the Spirit comes, we may believe.

Yes, Jesus is being prophetic here in our gospel.
Jesus is prophesying, speaking of the future.

Here Jesus is envisioning a new reality, and it is his voice that inspires, and makes us believe.

And so, Friends, WE ARE living in a new reality, a new reality of the Spirit.

We are living in a new reality even now.

Yes, Jesus is NOT one of many prophetic voices in history.

No, Jesus is THE prophetic voice, so that we can't help but believe.

We believe there is a new reality, a new order, a new day, and it has dawned upon us.

PAUSE

Even so, Friends, we still long for prophetic voices to speak to us today.

Even so, we still long for visions for our world as we navigate the issues of our day.

And, we don't know where or when those persons with visions, where those persons with voices that inspire and speak truth so as to make us believe...we don't know where and when such persons will emerge.

I wonder if our world is short of such visionaries, such prophets, because there is a cacophony of voices on the television, on-line, in the media, such that it has become that much harder to weed through all the noise to hear prophetic voices, and it is that much harder to weed through all the images to see the vision.

We are just bombarded by media, sound and fury, all the time.

But we do have to be all on the look out for it—for that prophetic visionary. It is what our world needs now more than ever.

And, to be sure, if there is one thing for which we should pray fervently it is this.

We should be praying for God to raise up visionaries.

We should be praying for God to bring to light persons who inspire and make us believe.

PAUSE

Again, we don't know from what quarter any prophetic visionary will originate.

But, we do know that if we, as a whole human family, are NOT looking for such persons...

If we are NOT praying for such persons to be revealed...

If we are not talking about the possibilities, that this person or that person inspires, and thus this person or that person may just be the next visionary pointing us to a new reality...

If we are not looking for such persons, well, then, we will probably not see such persons—if we are not looking, and praying, talking about it.

Seeking visionaries means using our vision—it means keeping our eyes open...

...to look literally for God's visionary, prophetic persons from among God's people.

We need to imagine and to envision that God is calling visionaries from among us, and we need to acknowledge that God is speaking to us his vision through the prophetic voice of such people, so that we may believe in the Spirit's power stirring among us.

For this, this is how God's reality comes to fruition in the here and the now.

Thanks be to God. Amen.