

**First in a Series of Four Sermons 20:20 Vision: Focused on Jesus the Lamb
November 1, 2020, All Saints' Sunday
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Revelation 7:9-17 After this I looked, and behold a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb....These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb....For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their Shepherd....

Dear Friends in Christ,

2020. It's been quite the year. Anyone here ready for it to be over? Two months to go. I saw a little meme with a caption, "Historian in 2070 introducing a documentary about 2020 - what you're about to witness is a nightmare.

Another read, "2020 is a very unique Leap Year - 29 days in February, 300 days in March, five years in April."

And my favorite, "If 2020 was a drink, it would be a colonoscopy prep!"

Today we begin a four-part sermon series, as we head towards the end of this church year, and the theme of our series is, "2020 Vision." Physically speaking, as many of us understand, our eyesight declines as we get older. But spiritually speaking, the opposite is true - our vision is meant to get better with age. The writer the Hebrews, in chapter 12, compares life to a race that is set before us. He urges the people of God to be focused on Jesus who is the author and the finisher of our faith, to be focused on Jesus who for the joy that was set before him did endure the cross, He was dead and He was buried, but now He is risen, and to this very day, He is seated at the right hand of the Father where He rules all of heaven and earth, in all of our days, He invites us to stay focused on Him, no matter what.

Next week we focus on Jesus the Bridegroom, the Sunday after that Jesus the Master, and the Sunday after that, Jesus the Judge. Today, we focus on Jesus the Lamb. Two truths about the Lamb we find in our lessons for today. ***Truth #1 about 20/20 vision that the Lamb has given us every reason to be grateful here and now, and truth #2 about 20/20 vision is that the Lamb has given us every reason to be delighted about the future.***

Truth #1 about 20/20 Vision is that the Lamb has given us every reason to be grateful here and now.

A true story is told about Maxmillan Kolba, who was a prisoner of war in Auschwitz, Poland. The year was 1941, and Kolba was a Franciscan priest who had been thrown into this death camp for the crime of helping Jews escape Nazi terrorism. Months went by, and in desperation, an escape took place. The camp rule was then enforced. Ten people would be rounded up randomly and herded into a cell where they would die of starvation and

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exposure as a lesson against future escape attempts. Names were called. A Polish Jew, Frandishek Gasovnachek was called. He cried, "Wait, I have a wife and children!"

At which point Kolba stepped forward and said, "I will take his place." Kolba was marched into the cell with nine others where he ended up dying of starvation.

The story was chronicled on an NBC news special years later. Gasovnachek was by that time 82, and he was shown telling this story while tears streamed down his cheeks. Near his house was a marble monument carefully tended with flowers. The inscription read: IN MEMORY OF MAXIMILLAN KOLBA, HE DIED IN MY PLACE. Every day since 1941, he lived with the knowledge, "I live because someone died for me." Every day he was as grateful as he could possibly be that his life had been spared. Every day, he would tell anyone who cared to listen about the man who had died that he might live.

And so, on this All Saints' Sunday we are grateful first of all that the Lamb of God has willingly stepped forward to be slaughtered, that the wrath of a righteous God could be satisfied and our sins could be forgiven. Grateful that the Lamb of God put an end to the thousands and thousands of Old Testament bloody sacrifices of sheep and goats and pigeons and doves by offering up a once and for all sacrifice. Grateful that the Lamb of God has taken away the guilt of our sins, He has taken away the shame of our sins, He has taken away the stain of our sins.

In a secondary way on this All Saints' Sunday, we are grateful also for the saints who have gone on before us. Grateful for moms and dads that provided and protected and paved the way for us to be safe and successful in life. Grateful for grandmas and grandpas who sacrificed and saved and settled on land with a vision that their descendants could follow in their footsteps. Grateful on this All Saints' Sunday for great grandparents and Sunday School Teachers and pastors and aunts and uncles and a host of witnesses who have taught us and encouraged us in the faith.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers who is traveling through the hills and the valleys of life together. Some days they go straight and true, other days they drift and they wander, still other days feel like it's a one long detour, but every week they have this habit of coming back into the sanctuary, and together they are grateful. Grateful that in the waters of Baptism, their names have been written in the book of life. Grateful that as often as they admit their failures and their faults, their soiled garments are washed clean. Grateful that no matter what happens along the way, it is their privilege to be the children of God. Grateful that even when the world around them seems to be going to hell in a handbasket, worthy is the Lamb, who is still reigning on His throne.

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Truth #2 about 20/20 vision is that the Lamb has given us every reason to be delighted about the future.

A true story is told about a boy whose mom had died and his father was trying to be both mother and father to him. One day he planned a picnic for the next day, together they made plans, they fixed a lunch, and they packed the car. In the middle of the night, the little boy stood alongside his dad and shook him awake. The dad asked why he was up and what was the matter? The son answered that he couldn't sleep because he was so excited about tomorrow. His father explained "I'm sure you are, and it's going to be a great day. But if we don't get some sleep, the day won't be so great, so why don't you just run down the hall, get back in bed, and get a good night's rest? The boy trudged down the hall, and got into bed. Sleep came to the dad, but not the son. Soon he was back, pushing and shoving his dad to wake up. Before the father opened his eyes, harsh words almost blurted out of his mouth, until he saw his son's face. What's the matter now, son? "Dad, I just wanted to thank you for tomorrow."

Dad, I just wanted to thank you for tomorrow. On this All Saints' Sunday, we do well not just to be grateful for what God has done for us in the past, we do well to be delighted with what he has promised for the future. These days, the world is focused on covid-19 and the fear of being infected, the fear of being hospitalized, the fear of dying. And yet in the middle of all that fear, the people of God are able to live not so much paralyzed with fear, but rather as travelers on their way to a better place. Instead of living in terror of pandemic, they say things like "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, He makes me to lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside still waters. Instead of freaking out about which political party is about to prevail, they say things like "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, even though my candidate may lose, the gates of hell will never prevail against the Church. Even though society may as full of chaos and confusion as they have ever seen, as often as they fix their eyes on Jesus Christ, they can see clearly.

With 20/20 vision, they live by faith, not by sight. They know that there will be an end to the great tribulation, they know that in heaven they will be before the throne of God, that the Lamb will be their shepherd, and their life together will be delightful. Delightful, I say, for in heaven there will be no more hunger, no more thirst, and no more virus. Delightful, I say, for in heaven they will be living in the flesh, face to face with Jesus, the Lamb who will be shepherding them and guiding them to springs of living waters. Delightful, for in heaven there will be no more defeats and no more partisanship and no more division and no more tears, for God will be wiping away every tear from their eyes.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers who agree with St. Paul. They say things like "for me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." and "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." They understand what Jesus was teaching in His Sermon on the

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Mount - as often as they mourn over their sins, that often they shall be comforted with the forgiveness of sins. As often as they hunger and thirst for the righteousness of Christ offered in Word and Sacrament, that often they shall be satisfied. As often as they show mercy to their neighbors, the mercy of Almighty God gets poured out on them.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of saints who spend their days both grateful and delighted. Grateful for the grace of God here and now and delighted as they anticipate the glory of life yet to come. Grateful here and now as often as they behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and delighted as they look forward to that day when they will stand before the Lamb clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. Grateful as they fight their way through all kinds of temptation and tribulation here and now, and delighted to know that the day is coming when they shall have made it through to the other side. Both grateful and delighted they are as often as they fix their eyes on Jesus who is both the author and the finisher of their faith, or to say it another way, 20/20 vision.