

## A Crisis Of Vision

Luke 20:27-38 (November 6, 2022)

by Paul Matheson

I want to start this morning with a bit of advice that I received early on, when I was learning how to drive: “Keep your eyes focused at a distance,” the instructor said. Don’t concentrate on what’s immediately in front of you. But rather, look farther down the road.



I’ve found that advice helpful over the years. I remember sitting in the back seat when my dad was driving the car. I noticed how many little course corrections he would make. He was constantly twitching the steering wheel back and forth. It seemed a lot of frivolous movement when we were wanting to travel in a straight line. I figured there must be a better way.

Look far down the road. Growing up in the city, I have many fond memories of summer holidays spent on my uncle’s farm. I loved being out in the wide open spaces. The fresh air. The beauty of God’s creation.



Learning to drive a tractor was great fun. It was all so exciting! I was proud to learn these skills, things my friends in the city knew nothing about. I remember the day Uncle Donald attached a plow to the three-point hitch. “Today, he said, you’re going to learn a special kind of skill.”

He took me out to the field. “I want you to pick something way off in the distance, maybe that tree or fence post, and stay focussed on it. “Yes, you’ll need to look behind sometimes: check the depth of your plow, make sure a rock has not tripped one of the plowshares. But if you want to make a furrow that’s straight, you’ll need to keep your eye on what’s *ahead* of you. Keep your attention focussed.”

I seem to remember Jesus saying something about that too? When some would-be follower got distracted by this or that, Jesus said: “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62) In other words, keep looking forward.

One final story about driving. And this has to do with crossing a bridge. I don’t mean a short bridge, but something and maybe narrow too. Something like the old traffic bridge, before it was replaced. It could be a challenge, getting through there. Especially if you were meeting something large, like a motor home.



How would you manage to thread that needle? The trick is to look far down the road. Don’t focus on the thing that’s coming. Or the guard rail on the other side. Don’t even think of dropping over the edge. Instead, keep looking forward. Pick a spot in the distance, maybe where the road meets solid ground on the far bank of the river. Concentrate on that, and you’ll be fine.



Why am I telling you all this? It’s because I see many distractions in our world. Things that can draw us off centre. Cause us to zig-zag all over the place in our lives of faith. And possibly even make us crash.



What kind of distractions am I talking about? They're not small or trivial things. No, these are big. They feel like a motorhome, or a transport truck bearing down upon us. Flashing lights warn of a wide load ahead. "Move over, make way." We'd better pay attention. But we don't want to land ourselves in the ditch either. It requires a steady hand to navigate this kind of world.

There are many warning lights flashing these days. Can you name some of them? They appear in a barrage of headlines. They rise up in our conversations with family and friends. There's no getting away from them. And to be clear, I'm not suggesting for a moment, that we ignore them. I'm simply calling us to keep our focus. Look far down the road. Live for what matters.

It's so easy to be overwhelmed with anxiety, surrounded as we are by the complexities of the world: Changing weather patterns. Economic uncertainties. Political instabilities. Harsh rhetoric in the public sphere. A crisis of homelessness. Questions of racism and gender identities. Historical legacies that leave us reeling.

And now more dangerous sabre-rattling in the world than I can recall in the span of my relatively short lifetime. We thought, after the Cuban missile crisis, that the threat of some nuclear confrontation had subsided. Yet here we find ourselves yet again. "Nation rising up against nation, kingdom against kingdom." (Matthew 24:7)



Russian diaspora protests against war in Ukraine, by Silar, March 6, 2022. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:02022\\_1234\\_Russian\\_diaspora\\_protests\\_against\\_war\\_in\\_Ukraine.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:02022_1234_Russian_diaspora_protests_against_war_in_Ukraine.jpg)

On this Peace Sunday, we recognize the terrible destruction brought by war. The massive loss of life that has occurred in the last century – not only through those highly visible confrontations, but smaller conflicts that simmer on the local level and often go unnoticed. We think too of the conflicts we experience closer to home. Interpersonal rivalries and disagreements. Things that separate us and keep us divided.

How do we find our way through all this as Christians? How do we navigate the path before us?



In our gospel reading today we have a confusing passage of scripture. The Sadducees argue with Jesus about ... what? Can you remember? Did you even understand it? It sounds like one of those arcane questions debated by theologians in the middle ages, like "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" Does it really matter?

The Sadducees question Jesus about a woman who had seven husbands, all of whom died. "In the resurrection," they ask, "whose wife will she be?" But their question is so far off base, that Jesus doesn't know where to begin to answer. These religious leaders are not able to imagine a future that is any different than the world they live in now.

Jesus says the future is *not* like that. In the age to come, there is no need for marriage or procreation or preservation of property. In the age to come, says Jesus, we're like the angels, living a life of love in the service of God. We'll all be children of God, children of resurrection. That sounds pretty good to me!

The future will be different!

The Sadducees have, what I would call, a crisis of vision. They cannot see the world that Jesus sees. They're zig-zagging all over the place. They fret about things they don't need to fret about. Whose wife will she

be? Jesus shakes his head. Don't worry about it. Just know this: Our God is a God of the living. God always brings new life.

At the end of all things is a promised kingdom of hope and peace and joy. A world of goodness and kindness and love. A world of justice and right-relationship. A kingdom of life! Can you see it? You have to look *forward*. You can't let yourself be distracted by all the impossibilities that confront us. You have to keep your eye on the goal. Move towards the vision of God's reign – at least as much of it as we can grasp.

See the peace, and aim for that – even as our world is bent on self-destruction. Keep your focus. Don't give up. Love your neighbour. Pray for your enemies. Live your life each day as citizens of a new world order. Aim for the kingdom of God.



It's a long-term vision, isn't it?



A story is told of a tourist who visited Disney World in Florida soon after its completion. He saw the castles and the displays and the fantastical world that had been created there. And he commented: "Isn't it too bad that Walt Disney didn't live to see this?"

Walt Disney died in 1966, and work didn't start on his project till the following year. "But he did see it," replied Mark Vance, the Creative Director of Disney Studios. "He *did* see it. That's why it's here!"<sup>1</sup>

That's so true of many projects. It takes the founder's vision, followed by the labour of many willing workers, to bring that vision to completion. It's why disciples of Jesus keep looking to the future that he envisioned, and work to make it a reality in their lives.



So what does that mean for us here at FMC on this Peace Sunday?

It means we are workers in God's kingdom. We're not easily sidetracked, or discouraged. We don't give up hope. When we run up against situations that seem daunting, we persevere. When we're tempted to veer off track, we stick to the path. After ninety years as disciples of Jesus, we still move *forward* with our eyes on Jesus and his vision of the reign of God.

And what does this mean in your life? I want you to have a look at this painting by a Quaker minister named Edward Hicks. It's one of 62 versions of the Peaceable Kingdom that Hick's painted.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/9030680-isn-t-it-too-bad-walt-disney-didn-t-live-to-see>, Accessed Nov. 5, 2022.





These paintings all represent a prophecy from the book of Isaiah: “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” (Isaiah 11:6) I guess you could say that Hicks was keen to focus on God’s future!

In this particular painting, can you see the tree in the background? Notice there are two trunks, and that one of them is broken.

During the 1820’s a severe rift formed within the Society of Friends. This split is represented by the shattered tree. The painting expresses Hick’s desire for that rift to be healed,

for his community of faith to be drawn into God’s kingdom of peace, characterized by the lion and the ox, the leopard and the lamb.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, I guess we humans – even faithful, well-intentioned ones – are slow to enter God’s new creation.

Are there rifts within your life? Is there brokenness that needs to be healed? Words that have been spoken? Stands taken? Tree trunks shattered? Is there some possibility of reconciliation you can work toward? Can this vision of the end of all things be a guiding force that draws you forward – one step forward on the road to God’s reign?



Sometimes I think we’re like the Sadducees. We can’t imagine a future that is any different. All we see are problems, impossibilities. Simply more of the same. We dismiss God’s future as some utopian vision, which may be nice to think about, but hardly a realistic hope for our lives.

The problem, of course, is that if we keep our eye on the ditch, that is probably where we will land. (We’ll be off the bridge and into the water!) Our passage today invites us all to lift our eyes and focus on something bigger. Something greater. Something far more beautiful. Can you see it, there, in the distance?

And the Good News in all of this is that God is bigger than we think. What appears to us as impossible is *not* impossible for God!

This is the God who raised Jesus from the dead. God broke the lock of a stone-sealed tomb. God lifted up Jesus’ bruised and battered body. God honoured the vision of his servant and made Christ the source of healing and new life for all creation.



Plaque depicting saints rising from the dead, photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen (2012)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/11081>, Accessed Nov. 5, 2022.

God's vision is not more of the same. God's vision is for a world made *new*. A peaceable kingdom. May that be the vision that informs and motivates and inspires your life! May it be so personally and collectively, in ways that are large and small.