

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Future"

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

Rev. Steve Filyk

July 5, 2020

Songs/Hymns: My hope is built on nothing less #349, Cornerstone (Hillsong Worship), Shall we gather at the river #797

Are you confident about the future?

Do you look forward to coming years with anticipation and hope?

The Global outlook isn't so promising.

There's COVID and a crawling economy.

There's social upheaval and environmental concerns.

Authoritarian regimes are flexing their muscles,  
and democratic freedoms are being threatened.

While we celebrated our nation's founding this past Wednesday

"Hong Kongers [became] subject to a new law...

That criminalizes talk of independence

and essentially outlaws criticism

of the Chinese Communist Party...

Anyone who merely mentions the issues

that have electrified Hong Kong for the past year

could find themselves charged with crimes

that carry sentences of up to life in prison.<sup>i</sup>

But if the global picture doesn't leave you feeling buoyant,

The outlook for the church won't lift your spirits either.

This past November, the Anglican Church of Canada  
Released membership projections based on broad categories  
Including the number of people on parish rolls,  
average Sunday attendance,  
And regular givers.

Rev Neil Elliot, statistician for the church noted  
“We’ve got simple projections from our data  
that suggest that there will be no members, attenders or givers  
in the Anglican Church of Canada  
by approximately 2040...”

In a response to a question on how other Canadian churches were faring,  
Elliot said data collected by the United Church of Canada  
also showed 2040 as a “zero-member date.”

The Presbyterian Church in Canada, while declining,  
seems to be losing members somewhat more slowly, he said.<sup>ii</sup>

Cold comfort...  
we are dying somewhat more slowly.

But if you have little hope for the world or our church  
Then how about your own life?  
Is there hope for tomorrow?

One writer notes the research of Duke University’s Med school which  
“Suggests that physical decline begins in the decade of the 50s  
And worsens as we age.”<sup>iii</sup>

Some of you are thinking, “I wish I was still fifty!”

But you don’t have to be fifty to see irreversible decline in aging.

I was at the audiologist the other day to check in on my hearing.

I was advised to start thinking about hearing aids.

On the surface the outlook for the globe, the church,

and even our own lives

isn’t always very cheerful.

I’m reminded of Leonard Cohen’s lament

In his song “The Future”:

“Give me back the Berlin wall

Give me Stalin and St. Paul

I’ve seen the future, brother

...It is murder”

But what about our faith.

Does our faith give us any reasons for hope?

Today we are returning to the Apostle Paul’s correspondence

With the church at Corinth,

That letter that the Bible calls “Second Corinthians.”

In this very personal correspondence,

Paul shares his own battles with suffering.

In one passage he lists the various of persecutions he’s endured  
including scourging and beatings.<sup>iv</sup>

In another passage he talks about despairing of life itself.<sup>v</sup>

In today's passage he continues in this vein  
By talking about his body 'wasting away'.

And yet today Paul doesn't seem discouraged.  
In fact, Paul is exceedingly hopeful about the future.

So why is this?

First of all, he notes that even while the Christian life involves dying daily,  
There is a daily renewal.<sup>vi</sup>

That is even while he bears the pain of mistreatment,  
Even while he faces the inevitable decline of age,  
God strengthens him in his inner being, each day.

Many of us have experienced this.

God picks us up from our despair  
By answering a prayer,  
whispering a word of encouragement,  
Or showering a blessing on our heads.

But Paul argues further,  
and this is where he keeps his focus,

Paul argues that his present suffering is really only small potatoes  
When one considers the eternal life that God has prepared for us

Just listen to verse 17:

“our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us  
an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”<sup>vii</sup>

When you read later in chapter 11 about all that Paul has suffered  
It is quite something for him to describe his troubles  
As light and fleeting.

In terms of persecution at least,  
Paul has been through more than all of us combined!

But Paul is only able to say this because he has been given a glimpse  
Of what God has prepared for those who love him  
In the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

When he thinks of Jesus’s resurrection  
Being his and our future,  
All that present suffering doesn’t feel so bad.

Now please keep in mind  
That Paul isn’t thinking about shedding this mortal coil  
To enjoy a disembodied experience of heaven.

“... the resurrection of Jesus... was regarded by Paul  
and others in the early church  
as the model and prototype of the one that is to come...”<sup>viii</sup>

When Paul talks about being  
    ‘clothed with our heavenly dwelling’  
    He isn’t talking saying goodbye to bodily existence,  
    But getting an upgrade:

Receiving a new resurrected body like Jesus.

Paul believes that this is his and our future.  
    And it is this good future that brackets and relativizes  
    All the present suffering he is experiencing.  
    It makes his troubles tolerable.

But if Paul see this, how can we?

How can we look past, look beyond  
    What we read in the news, note in the pews  
    And see reflected in the mirror?

Paul tell us we need to “fix our eyes  
    Not on what is seen, but what is unseen.”<sup>ix</sup>

Our eyeballs obviously can’t discern the unseen.  
    Paul is talking about a different type of vision.  
    Paul is talking about seeing with the eyes of faith.

But how exactly do we do this?

How can we imagine global peace  
    When we can’t get along with our neighbor?

How can imagine a multitude singing God's praises  
When we can't even fill this small sanctuary?

How can imagine new resurrected bodies  
When we need our own personal pharmacies  
To keep the old body going?

At our Bible study this past week  
It was noted that in a certain sense  
being able to see with the eyes of faith  
Is simply a gift of God's grace.

You can only receive it.

But we also acknowledge that there are certain things  
We can do to keep our spiritual vision sharp,  
Our spiritual eyesight clear.

Reading Scripture reminds us of God's promises.  
Turning to God in prayer gives us perspective on our own situation.  
Regular worship and fellowship  
provides us with encouragement,  
When dark fog clouds cover the skies.

With clear eyes keenly focused future that God has promised,  
We are able to follow Jesus along difficult paths  
And face the future with hope

Let me read a few paragraphs from *Living Faith*,  
Our church's statement of faith.

I'm reading selections from the final chapter,  
Which is appropriately entitled "Our Hope in God".

*God has prepared for us  
things beyond our imagining.  
Our hope is for a renewed world  
and for fullness of life in the age  
to come...*

*into a condition fit for life with  
God...*

*Life had its beginning in God.  
In God it will come to completion  
and its meaning be fully revealed.  
All creation will find fulfillment in  
God.<sup>x</sup>*

*Eternal life is resurrection life.  
As God raised Christ,  
so shall we be raised*

So whether we are living in a time of global stability or upheaval  
Whether the church is in decline or growing,  
Whether our bodies are healthy or sick  
May know that God is with us  
And that God has a good future in store for us.

Amen.

<sup>i</sup> A eulogy for Hong Kong's dream of freedom" The Globe & Mail [www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/article-a-eulogy-for-hong-kongs-dream-of-freedom/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/article-a-eulogy-for-hong-kongs-dream-of-freedom/)

<sup>ii</sup> Tali Folkins "'Wake-up call': CoGS hears statistics report on church membership decline" November 9, 2019 [www.anglicanjournal.com/wake-up-call-cogs-hears-statistics-report-on-church-membership-decline/](http://www.anglicanjournal.com/wake-up-call-cogs-hears-statistics-report-on-church-membership-decline/)

<sup>iii</sup> Candy Sagon "Stay Active: Physical Decline Starts Earlier Than Thought" August 25, 2016 <https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-2016/fitness-aging-physical-decline-cs.html#:~:text=New%20study%20says%20decline%20begins%20in%20our%2050s&text=Researchers%20with%20Duke%20University's%20School,those%20who%20don't%20exercise.>

<sup>iv</sup> See 2 Corinthians 11:23ff

<sup>v</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:8

<sup>vi</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16 NIV

<sup>vii</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:17 NIV

<sup>viii</sup> NT Wright *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* 53

<sup>ix</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV

<sup>x</sup> *Living Faith* 10.1, 10.4, 10.5