

Vision 2010

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Date: 15 January 2006

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 00] On Friday in the National Post, yet again, there was an article about the last Anglican turning out the lights in the Anglican Church, last Anglican in Canada turning out the lights in the Anglican Church in the year 2061.

I don't know how many of you read the National Post. It was one of the columnists once again revisiting an article which had appeared, I think, in November or December.

And the article is based on a study commissioned sort of by some of the bishops in the Anglican Church of Canada. And I don't think the bishops expected to have somebody speak so frankly. And that analysis said that given that the Anglican Church of Canada is losing about 2% of its membership a year, I think is what it is, he predicted that by the year 2061, the last Anglican will leave the Anglican Church.

The good news, the news I have for you this morning as a person who used to do statistics is that his analysis was probably quite false because he made the mistake of assuming a straight linear decline.

[1 : 23] And I don't know how many of you have visited other Anglican churches in this diocese or in other places, but in many Anglican churches today, 90% or three-quarters percentage of the congregation is over 65.

And so what that means when you have a declining attendance and an increasing average age, it's called slowly rolling towards a precipice, a precipice that would be reached far before the year 2061 unless God does a new thing and we are open to God doing a new thing.

In fact, this gloomy description is not just something which is happening to the Anglican Church in Canada in general. I've been ordained now for 20 years, over 20 years, and I've served my whole ordained ministry in this diocese.

And I don't know what the population of Ottawa has increased in the last 20 years. I don't know if it's doubled. It might have doubled. It's gotten quite a bit bigger. But there are fewer Anglican churches in the diocese now than there were when I was ordained 20 years ago.

There are fewer than when I was ordained 20 years ago. And that fewer is, in fact, even masking a deeper problem in that many of the Anglican, not many, but an increasing number of Anglican churches in our diocese have moved from having been able to afford a full-time priest to, in fact, having to afford a half-time or a three-quarter time priest.

[2 : 52] Aylmer is now a part-time priest in Aylmer. It's an increasing problem even in our own diocese.

As well as that, many of you know that those of you who follow the paper or who've been coming to Anglican churches for a while know that the Anglican Church of Canada is in the midst of a continuing crisis sparked by or revealed by the desire of North Americans to bless same-sex unions.

And we know that ultimately the issue isn't over that, but it's ultimately over the Bible and the authority of the Bible and the Lordship of Jesus Christ and, in fact, what the Christian faith is at all. And the Anglican Church of Canada is suspended from the Anglican Communion currently. And the primates of the Anglican world have called on Anglican Church of Canada to repent because it appears as if we are walking apart from the Christian faith and walking apart from the Anglican Communion.

My observation is that since that call was issued in February of 2005, very little has been done. In our own diocese, we have gone from being in a continuing crisis to a deep crisis.

[4 : 14] Just before Christmas, an action took place in our diocese, which means that now this diocese has, in fact, ended all discussion on the issue of same-sex blessings and that, in fact, this

diocese now has a policy, although not widely known, of encouraging same-sex marriages and allowing non-celibate people who are attracted to same-sex knowledge, allowing those people to be ordained.

I didn't express that very well. It's an emotional thing to talk about. Basically, the diocese has, in effect, changed its policy just before Christmas in favor of same-sex marriage and in the legitimizing of all that's involved in a lifestyle which the Bible teaches our sinful actions.

In fact, on Thursday, the Archdeacon of Ottawa Centre resigned as the Archdeacon over this issue after an attempt to see if the diocese would change its course.

And it does not look like they will, so she resigned. I could go on to the promotion of pagan ceremonies, the promotion of people who deny the divinity of Christ, the promotion of video series that promote the confusion, promote confusion about what Christianity is, and probably some of you folks could add some more.

And you're all probably saying, I'm so glad I came to St. Albans to be cheered up and encouraged. Well, George, now that we've had the good news, let's all color some pictures and talk about bunny rabbits.

[6 : 06] No, I don't know. I apologize to guests, you know. You're like, whoa, you know. Maybe some of you are wondering how you can simply slip out after an introduction like that.

I think I've illustrated that we have a problem. Houston, we have a problem. When I'm faced increasingly, I mean, one of the benefits of all of this crisis, if you can talk about there being benefits of a crisis, is that for me personally, it has forced me time and time and time again to go to the scriptures and to go to prayer.

And I know this summer in particular, I wrestled mightily with many of these things, you know, because as many of you know, I've taken steps that could endanger my career.

In fact, actually, I think there's now only three dioceses in the country that would ever allow me to be a priest. The Arctic, the Yukon, and northern British Columbia.

Yeah. So, you know, and so this, but this summer, the message that kept coming to me is that, George, I'm calling you to be fully reliant on me. Frog, fully reliant on God, isn't it?

[7 : 25] You know, maybe we should get a big frog symbol in our church, and just as long as people understand what that means. In the crisis, I have increasingly had to go to prayer and into searching the scriptures.

How can we as a parish be godly in such a context? How can we as a parish, how can I as a priest be a godly priest in such a context? Today, I'm going to share briefly, first of all, three passages of scripture that have helped to form my heart, and then I'm going to share with you this Vision 2010 document.

But first, let's go to the Bible. And I invite you, this morning, I'm going to use the Bible, which I use in my own personal devotions and study all of the time.

So the words are going to be a little bit different than the Pew Bibles. But turn in your Pew Bibles to page 1026. Page 1026, and it's 1 Timothy chapter 1, verses 1 to 7.

1 Timothy 1, 1 to 7, on page 1026. I'm really going to be looking at verse 5. Just very briefly, three passages which have helped to inform my heart in the midst of this crisis.

[8 : 34] And this is called one of the pastoral epistles. It is from Paul towards the end of his life, writing a letter to a young man who has been placed in a leadership position in a church which has many powerful and persuasive elders who are leading the congregation astray.

And Paul is sending Timothy, or not sending, but urging Timothy to stay in a church which doesn't want to change, and which is led by significant elders teaching false doctrine.

Here's how the letter goes. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, my true child in the faith.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia at Ephesus, that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the good order from God that is by faith.

Just want to pause here for a second. You know, one of the wonderful things in this passage of Scripture is that Paul doesn't order Timothy to stay and suffer, but he urges him to stay and suffer.

[10 : 01] And he says, Timothy, you're a young man, and you're going to be staying here in this church, and your first task is to stop the false teaching.

This false teaching encourages speculations, which another way to translate it would be vain, idle chatter.

Stop vain, idle chatter. They would probably, the elders would probably describe their conversation not as vain, idle chatter, but higher wisdom, or greater insight, or being learned in the ways of the world.

I mean, you know, nobody describes themselves as saying, please come out to a lecture here at Ottawa U where it's going to specialize in vain, idle chatter. You know, take a seminary course in vain, idle chatter.

Like, nobody advertises it. That it's always a way of being cutting edge. Years ago, a friend of mine in the Anglican Church said, the Anglican Church keeps looking for new cutting edges to impale itself on.

[11 : 09] And unfortunately, it's too often true. And Lord, may it not be true of us. Because it's very easy for us to seek different doctrines.

And to seek different doctrines is to turn from a good order from God. And that good order from God is one which emphasizes faith in Jesus Christ as the heart of what we do.

Listen to verse 5. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion.

Desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. Now, verse 5 is what I really just wanted to share very briefly about.

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. The aim of our charge. You know, whatever the way forward is for us, it isn't just, it can't be just to make good Anglicans.

[12 : 20] It just can't be to protect or to save the institution. The aim of our charge, and I say that not to put down, I'd love being an Anglican.

You know what, if I make some comments, the one thing I don't want you to leave thinking is that I don't, I'd love the Anglican way of following Jesus. I do.

It is an ancient way of following Jesus, which is deeply biblical, respectful of the wisdom of the men and women, godly men and women who have gone before us.

That is open to ordered prayer and committed to the reading of scripture and the study of prayer. Is suspicious of complex doctrinal systems and constantly calls us back to the Bible.

Is willing to not merely describe the past just for the sake of being old. I love the Anglican way of following Jesus. I do.

[13 : 19] I really do. But our aim, whatever our aim is, our aim is captured in verse 5. Our aim has to be love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

What that means is that our aim is a love of God. God is to know the love of God and to love God, to be open to the love of God in such a way that we know that unless God pours his love into our hearts, we cannot love him.

And our aim is not to be negative. Our aim is not to be opposed for the sake of being opposed. Our aim isn't to be ornery. Our aim isn't to be different. Our aim always has to be God.

To love God. To know God. To not just love knowing about God or knowing about, but to love God and to be open to God. And our aim has to be that positive desire to know God and to love him and to love others and to love ourselves through our knowledge and our love of God.

And this is based upon or issues from three things. And I'm going to do them in reverse order. A sincere faith in God's saving power through Jesus Christ.

[14 : 39] A sincere faith means, you know, it isn't like I get up here and talk religious talk, you know, on Sundays between 9.15 and, you know, quarter to 11.

And then I go back and I live my real life. A sincere faith is one which is open, which is public, which is unashamed. Faith in Jesus Christ.

And the second aspect is a good conscience. A good conscience means that as we have our faith in Jesus Christ, that that inner moral guide, that inner moral compass that is within each person, that it understands that it has gone awry, but it has now been pardoned by God through faith in Jesus Christ.

And it means that inner moral compass can come under the sway of almighty God through faith in Jesus Christ. Understand that it has been pardoned and understand that it needs his lordship and the teaching of God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit, that our inner compass, our moral sense can be renewed and healed and pruned and reformed as we live our lives.

A sincere faith, a good conscience, and a pure heart. It is such a Christian cry. Purify my heart, O Lord. Purify my heart.

[15:59] Purify my heart. A heart where God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have made their home. A heart that is not like a hummingbird that's had lots of sugar that flits from place to place, but a heart that is growing in comfort with God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, making their home in our lives and making the renovations and the additions and the demolitions that we need, that we can be a wonderful home for God.

That's our aim. That's our aim. Any way forward always has to involve that aim. Now very briefly turn in your Bibles to page 549.

In some ways this has been the theme verse of my life. I can't remember now if it was the first or second verse of the Bible which I ever memorized. And I still know it.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your paths. I'm going to look at the Bible, but I know that's what it says.

Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. There's lots of times in my life that anxiety and other things makes me forget to do those things or frightens me, but it has been a constant verse in my life.

[17:22] Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. It means... The wardens and I have been working on the budget.

And they can tell you that every time we pray, that I pray around the budget, I say something like... I say I pray several things, but one of the things I pray is this. I say, God, you know that we don't know the future.

You know that we don't know whether we're going to get \$50,000 or \$500,000. You know that we are completely and utterly without knowledge.

Help us to trust in you. That's all we can do. You know, we don't know the future, but we can know the Lord of history.

We don't know the future, but we can know the Lord, who is the Lord Jesus Christ, who desires to know us today. And he is the Lord of the future. The future is present to him.

[18:21] And we can walk through life trusting in him, not knowing the future, but knowing who the true Lord is and his ability to care for us. And we are invited to trust in the Lord with all our heart.

Lean not on your own understanding. That means be skeptical of your mind. Be skeptical of best... Don't take that the wrong way. I'm not trying to denigrate the mind. I'm just saying...

You know, one of the things about alcoholics... Some of you have maybe struggled with best... You know, with addictions. One of the... One of the tragedies about addicts...

Addicts, in a sense, show what all human life is like. That an addict is often a very, very smart person who follows all of their thinking to destruction.

And what this is just saying is don't trust in the unaided use of your mind. Don't trust in techniques. Don't trust in technologies. Don't trust in false prophets who claim to be able to tell you exactly what's going to be happening.

[19:25] Don't trust in the cutting edge. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him. I mean, you know what?

I can tell you far too many times when I have been quiet in front of other people about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. But this verse challenges us to be public and unashamed of the gospel.

We have nothing to be ashamed of. Jesus is one who is to be... We are to be proud of Jesus. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your path. He will show us the way forward. One final verse.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to page 841. It's Matthew 9, verses 35 and 37. Every time I read this verse, some of you know that I love movies.

[20:29] And Matthew 9, verses 35 to 37. And I had one image that constantly came to me every time I read this verse. And it's the image of those of you who have seen the Lord of the Rings

movies.

It's the third movie. It's Aragorn with the small number of soldiers in front of the gates of Mordor. And he's riding around in his horse and he's saying, you know, there will be a day when we will grow old and we can't hold swords and we will die.

But this is not that day. And every time I read this passage of scripture, I could just picture Aragorn riding in front of the troops in front of the gate of Mordor saying, this is not that day.

And he was right. I hope I didn't spoil the movie if you haven't seen it yet. It's close to the end. And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

Folks, there we see a picture of what biblical ministry is. To teach, to go and to teach, to proclaim the gospel and to bring healing of every affliction.

[21 : 37] The whole gospel to the whole person to the whole world. You see it right there in a nutshell. And when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples, here's the Aragorn speech. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. In a sense, Jesus comes into our midst and says, well, you heard George's gloomy statistics. You have looked out at the world.

This is not your fate. The field is ripe for the harvest. That's what Jesus says to us. About 13 or 14 years ago, I was involved in a process in the diocese about coming up with a diocesan vision. Many of you have probably been involved in processes like that where they've just been like, I didn't like it. And I was profoundly skeptical about the whole process.

[22 : 47] And I didn't like how anything happened. I didn't like the idea of a vision. I didn't like any of those types of things. And you've already heard me confess that I like football and I like movies.

And I'm not really a very mystical type of guy. But there was this one day I was driving. I was in my former parish in Eganville. And it was as if God stopped me and spoke to me and said, George, what do you think the future?

If you were to stay here for another five years or ten years, what do you think it would look like? And I, of course, started to say to God the pious things which weren't true. And it was one of those times when God said to me, no, no, George, don't say pious things to me.

What do you really think it's going to be like? And it was crushing. It really was. I realized that if I looked at my heart, what I thought was that in ten years' time, if I was still there, I would still be faithful to Jesus Christ.

But the church would be smaller and the people would be older. And as soon as I realized that, I instantly realized that that could not possibly be a vision from God.

[23 : 58] It could not possibly be what God's heart was for St. John's Anglican Church in Eganville. No possible way that God could say, my good news of plan for St. John Eganville is to be smaller and older.

Like, that can't be his plan. And I realized that I was very good at mouthing pious thoughts, but that inwardly I needed to be challenged and to be healed as to what I was carrying around, as to what I thought God's plan was for that congregation.

At that moment, I started to realize that there is a need sometimes for vision statements. Vision statements that are formed by Scripture, that have at their heart the aim which is described in 1 Timothy 1, verse 5, and which have been purified and modified by the understanding of Proverbs 3, 5 and 6, to trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understandings.

In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths. And it means that we have to be willing to trust and we have to be willing to have that optimism that comes from Matthew chapter 9 about the fields being ripe for the harvest.

It means that we are to expect God to act and that we are to be willing to act and step out in faithfulness. And that if the Lord is going to show the way forward, that he puts that sometimes in words.

[25 : 25] So that, you know, because we human beings, you might have noticed, we use words. Like it happens, you know. And so it sometimes goes in words. And it's a way of describing after prayer and searching Scripture and searching our hearts what it is that God is calling us to move towards.

Not to live out of our woundedness. Not to live out of our sense of scarcity. Not to live out of a fearfulness in terms of what is going on in the world and what the future could bring. Not to live out of fear. Not to live out of wounds. Not to live out of any of those things. But to live out of what God is calling us to be in him. The piece of paper that you have in your hands, which I'm going to talk about very briefly now.

Is the result. It began last February. In some ways it began longer ago than that. It was partially kick-started by Ivan's bold pronouncement at Vestry that it's time for us to have a vision.

And it has involved people meeting since last February or March or whatever the time was. And gathered to pray and assure our hearts and to discuss and to continue to pray.

[26 : 42] This document was presented to Council in November and was unanimously adopted as what really should be a description of our mission and our vision.

And I am sharing this with you today in light of the prayer and of the work and of the unanimous decision of Council to say to you, I commit to this.

I believe this is a picture of what we are called to do and what we are called to be. And my hope and prayer is that when Vestry comes on February the 18th, that's our annual meeting, that you folks will say, We embrace this.

This is a picture of how we can be public and we can be united in moving forward. And we are hoping, I am hoping and I believe that you will embrace this other habit.

The habit is described in the foundations for growth and the key objectives in the middle. It's a habit of planning not from the past and not from our wounds and not from our fears.

[27 : 46] Not that we ignore any of the past or anything like that, but that we plan from the future. That we ask ourselves, how do we move forward? And so these foundations for growth and these key objectives, they describe the types of things that we really have to be working on over the next year or two as we move towards our vision and as we fulfill our mission.

But more than just sort of saying, yeah, these look like the right types of things to be doing over the next year or two. We also say that every fall that the leadership of this parish will spend time in prayer, looking at the mission, looking at the vision and saying over these next year or two, what are the types of foundations for growth we have to be working on?

What are the type of key objectives that we have to have to be abiding in God's will and to move forward? The mission statement ends up being the one that we are suggesting that we adopt, which has been my personal mission statement for this congregation for 10 years.

Helping ordinary people be confident, joyful disciples of Jesus Christ. What's the job of the altar guild? To help ordinary people be confident, joyful disciples of Jesus Christ.

What's Jono's job? To help ordinary people be confident, joyful disciples of Jesus Christ. What's Michelle's job when he greets? To help ordinary people be confident, joyful disciples of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 07] What's Andrew's job? Help ordinary people be... You got the picture? You know, whether we're having a yard sale, whether we're washing cars, whether we're raising money to send, you know, missionaries to short-term mission projects to Ecuador, whether we're helping the church in Nigeria, whether we're reaching out to the street, whether we come to clean the church, we always have one job.

Help ordinary people be confident, joyful disciples of Jesus Christ. I think it's an easy thing to remember, and it captures what our mission is. What are we trying to be? Where are we going? Where is God calling us? How can we describe that in a way that will keep on lasting for years beyond the specific plans that we have to develop? This is not a radical left turn from how the church, how I have been attempting to lead the church over the last few years, but the lay people who got involved with this have vastly improved it and deepened it.

St. Albans commits to being a prayer-filled, evangelical Anglican church united under Christ, glorifying God, and living out the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you look at the back page, there's some common, a few little explanatory things of some things in the vision. I just want to share evangelical Anglican church.

[30 : 29] This means an Anglican church in a recognizably Anglican spiritual tradition. It is the tradition of Wycliffe, of Cranmer, of Latimer, of Simeon, of Ryle, of John Stott, and J.I. Packer, of Archbishop Akinola, and Archbishop Young Ping Chung.

We believe that God is calling us to be a prayer-filled, evangelical Anglican church united under Christ, glorifying God and living out the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We uphold the authority of the Bible. We proclaim the good news of Jesus. We support and minister to one another. That means finding out what our gifts are, having a gift-based organizational structure, and using our gifts to make a positive difference, a grace-filled difference in the lives of one another.

Build community, especially through small groups. Raise up new generations of disciples. Worship in traditional and contemporary forms. And extend the grace of God into our homes, community, and the world.

I think this is wonderful. I hope you do too. I hope we can embrace that and say, yes, George, when we come to Vestry, let's plan to move forward to that.

[31 : 49] Let's be public and unashamed about that. These other things in the short run, we have to deal with, we have to improve property and facilities.

We want to have good problems of having too many kids in Sunday school and too many people here doing ministry. And that's a, I want to have, we have to plan for good problems.

And administrative structure really means, I'm, you're looking at prime blockage in the church, number one. I'm standing in the pulpit. How do we encourage lay ministry and lay wisdom to remove blockages and to be better organized?

How do, number three, how do we weave a sense of evangelism and the whole counsel of God into the parish DNA? Ministry costs money. Ministry costs money. How do we raise money in keeping with God's will to fund this vision?

Key objectives over the next year or two develop. We want to get littler. That's another way to express that. We want to get little. We want to have people meeting in houses and sharing God's word and praying for each other.

[33 : 01] We want to get little. We want to be known as the little church. And expand and improve our worship services, develop outreach events, and develop and expand ministry training.

We want to be a congregation of learners that are learning what it means to follow Jesus in our 24-7 lives and are helping people who are called to vocational, paid, full-time Christian ministry.

Friends, I think this is wonderful. I really commend all those lay people who have worked so hard, and I commend counsel for saying that this is where we should go.

There's a really corny but good television show that, here's my media image mind, and it's called Extreme Home Makeovers.

And three-quarters of the way in the show, they have everybody say, Move that bus. And in a sense, what we've just tried to do, I've tried to say to you, Move that bus, and this is where we're called to go.

[34 : 08] Let's go. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would fall afresh upon us with gentle but deep power.

Father, and once again, Father, we ask that you would fan into flame within us a desire to know you, to know you and be known by you above all things, not just to know about you but to know you. And we ask, Father, that you fan into flame within us a deep desire and longing to bring you honor and glory above all things, fan into flame within us a deep longing and yearning, Father, to know your will, to abide in your will, to live in your will.

Father, this we ask. In your mercy, hear our prayer, and so pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.