

# Vicar's Sermon

**Date :** Sun 25/02/2009.  
**Title :** Faith, Hope and Vision.  
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**Subject :** The future of the Church needs Faith, Hope and Vision.

Lent is a time when traditionally we try to be better than we are and when we discipline ourselves and try to be more like Jesus. Hopefully this is not just something we do during the brief period of Lent but throughout the whole of the year and the whole of our lives. **But it is important to remember that no matter how hard we try we won't succeed because as human beings we're just not strong or good enough.** But thank God that He has a solution for this because ultimately we are put right with God not through our works but by our faith. It is by faith alone that we are justified before God and faith is our theme for this morning.

As I was preparing this sermon I thought about those thousands of people who left their homes in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries and emigrated to new lands far away. They left everything and everyone that was familiar to them and journeyed out into the unknown with no assurance of a home, a job, an income or anything: they possessed nothing except their will to succeed and the vision of a new and better life. Most of them had not travelled further than a few miles down the road, had never visited their own capital cities and yet found themselves on a journey to the other side of the world.

The important thing was not the money in their pockets because they possessed so little but the hope and vision in their hearts and the longing and determination to see that vision realised. **And that is what we call faith.** It was the same faith that caused Abraham to leave everything behind in his old age because God had given him a vision of a new and promised land. It takes courage and determination but more than anything else it requires faith and such faith is what the Christian Church in Europe requires more than anything else today. The faith not to give up or give in but to trust in God's promises and to seek new ways of being a Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century rather than sticking to outdated forms of worship in buildings that were built and designed for a different era. The Churches that are growing today are meeting in buildings that look more like shopping centres than churches! And this is the challenge that lies before us: a challenge not so much about what we do but about what we believe and a challenge that says to every one of us "do you have a new vision for what God can do in and through the church in this century?"

You know a lot of those emigrants left their homes through sheer desperation because they had lost their land, their homes and the wherewithal to survive. It was a question of survival and indeed of desperation. Vision is often born out of such adverse circumstances. I believe that the Church is not far from such a point today and that if numbers keep falling, bills keep rising and buildings get more demanding we may be forced out of our traditional comfort zone to pursue a God-given vision.

But it must be a vision because a vision is a positive thing filled with hope and God's promise that ultimately things will be better. The prophet said "where there is no vision the people perish" and nothing could be more relevant to our situation today. Faith and vision go hand in hand because it's having a vision of where you want to go that inspires you and gives you the strength and determination to succeed against all the odds. Abraham and Moses never actually got to the Promised Land but they saw it in their hopes, visions and dreams. Martin Luther King died when Barack Obama was just a little boy and yet he had a vision of him as President in the White House. It is vision that keeps faith alive despite all the difficulties and set backs along the way.

And how we need that vision today if the Christian Church in this country is to fulfil its God-given purpose. We mustn't just think of ourselves and what we want but of all those who will come after us and who deserve a living vibrant Christian Church in this country.

You know the most important thing about taking a good photograph is not the camera or the lens, however expensive and sophisticated: it's not the location or even when you set the dials and press the button: the most important thing about taking a good photograph is your vision and what you see even before you pick up the camera. It's called pre-visualisation and it simply means knowing what you want to achieve before you start: in other words a vision of a powerful meaningful photograph: a vision of the Promised Land.

Many of those emigrants who left their native lands had no money to pay for the journey and so they ended up working their passage to the new world. Well, that's where the similarity ends because we can't work our passage into the Promised Land because it is by faith and not by works that we are saved. God will take His Church where He wants it to go but there is one similarity with those emigrants: we have to be prepared to get on board and that requires both faith and vision.

Amen.

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