

Write the Vision

Pray with me... may the words of my heart, and the meditations of all of your hearts be acceptable in your sight, you who are our rock and our redeemer. And my apologies be heard by Lin-Manuel Miranda, and my gratitude be felt for the time Martin Luther instructed us all to
“Love God, and sin boldly!” Amen.

How does an ancient, ragtag gang of disciples in need of a shower
Somehow convey God’s global love and power?
These ancient dudes and women,
somehow compose the vision,
inherited and given,
So by their love of Jesus and true zeal they were driven,
Evangelism means share the good news far and wide
But is love quite enough if there’s no one on your side?

Reformation is the name of every game,
Every gain,
An outgrowing of the shackles of the past,
Change is the only thing that lasts,
The awkward growing pains,
All under Jesus’ name.
As we wrestle one another just to find out we’re the same.
Just a different sort and kind.

It began well before, but we’re limited on time,
So let’s pick it up at crucifixion,
Neither myth nor fiction,
One of many martyred to the brutal Roman system,
But the Jesus story stuck, arisen and made new,
The disciples off and running telling every Greek and Jew.

The year's just 35, and Steven gets martyred
Paul gets converted, we're just getting started

Letter writing,

So exciting,

The early church gets hustling,

Making common errors

And the energy is bustling.

Between 65 and hundred in the common era

The Gospels get recorded,

Second temple gets destroyed,

Rome takes Jerusalem,

And with Christians they're annoyed.

The church moves out from the Middle East,

Communion now a Global Feast,

Bounding South

Open mouth

Thomas visits India, goes church planting,

No time for gallivanting

See the shape of the thing is re-forming and re-forming,

The act of living like the church; not performing

Disciples saw that food and shelter got distributed,

Common property was the plan, and their views in disrepute,

Hard to refute

They didn't look like other groups

Its century one and

The church has just begun,

Mark brings it to the Global South

the church

Does it with no merch,

Just a gospel led course,

Shouting til he's hoarse,
To North Africa,
Alexandria
From Jerusalem to Egypt
His former life eclipsed,
Yeah the church is on the move
Don't be fooled
By partial truths
The church was almost never just a bunch of white dudes.
It's different races and communities
Histories
Taxonomies of how we came to be
To believe
Contradictory
Ideas.
Could fill a decent space,
Different faces
Global spaces
Time to face it that we chose some wrong turns with our paces,
It's a story we're still writing,
Still inviting
Still inciting the necessary ruptures
Questioning the structures
til all God's people can be free.

So where were we...
Just the second century
Justin Martyr, writes his First Apology,
Before a hundred years goes by, Tertullian is on the fly,
Ireneaus and Origin, setting the stage theological
Giving order, make it logical,
Chronological
Story telling is a stressor

The Church of Christians in Edessa
Sets off in India in two-hundred CE,
The words of Thomas still resounding
Still confounding,
Persecutions running rife,
Refugees run in 345

You'll find a lot of church history is about being on the run,
Like Doctor Who
A scrappy crew,
Not just games and fun,
Not vacation Bible school,
Governments turning cruel,
And the church gets overturned
From within and without
Getting burned,
Like a phoenix rising
Still surprising,

Like how every seven years every cell within you
Is reborn, is made new,
Yet you remain,
Church is just the same,
Writing a vision big enough to view
Across the broad expanse of time,
Always preaching, never reaching,
The goals we're called to pursue.

Yet back in those early centuries
So many new calamities,
Putting structure to belief,
For some the rules are a relief,

The councils are beginning, repudiating this and glorifying that,

declaring homoousios with the Father as a fact.

Working harder, sometimes smarter,

Giving Christianity a starter

Easter date wasn't fixed until three hundred twenty-five

at the Council of Nicaea, long after Christ had died.

Rome becomes the grounding place, the churches Holy See

Constantinople decides to revise the Nicene Creed,

King Ezana of Ethiopia in century number four,

Declares "we're all Christians now",

though God's love was there before

New globe

It's not The Robe,

The story isn't neat,

It's a feat

Of humans running back and forth or in retreat,

No rehearsal,

No reversal

This is learning as we go, As we grow

Meanwhile ...

Constantine and his leadership

Contentious,

Pretentious

but they'll let the Christians slip,

Allow Christianity to persist,

To Exist

Above the ground

with slightly less fear of death at every sound.

He gets baptized on his death bed,

Next the whole empire's in,

Now Rome becomes a Jesus Nation,
One nation under God,
A national religion - sound odd?
Convert or lose your life,
Avoid the strife.

Fine we're all Christians now, just please leave us alone.
Friends we must atone
for such sins as this,
For giving such short shrift,
The choosing of Christ, lost so swift,
Love buried under fear.
But that could never happen here.

Meanwhile councils are continuing, Ephesus names Mary theotokos,
God-bearer, God mother, though she was all along of course,
Off course? Perhaps,
But the council of Chalcedon took it a step further, decide for the populous
The nature of God among us,
Jesus God and Jesus man,
Human and divine,
Both work fine.
As one, not to be outdone....

Second councils, third councils, refining and reforming,
By 608 a church is built inside the Pantheon,
Rome is getting quite hands on,

Meanwhile, elsewhere, first millennia is ending,
And to the north the church is sending,
Olaf of Norway converts by force,
Forget about Thor's,
Hammer and reputation,
The population's Christians, no refutation,

By ten-ninety-three
Hildegard starts to writing,
The vision reuniting,
By the Century 13,
We've got Aquinas and his *Summa*
Mighty keen,
And women's voices keep resounding
Stereotypes confounding,
Catherine of Siena and Julian of Norwich start assuming
The position of the writers of the vision,
Not presuming
That the voice of God speaks just to men?
Sharing truth that goes beyond
and through a thousand new revisions,
Bold voices often cut short
Silence on a gender enforced
Joan of Arc martyred in fourteen thirty-one,
What have we done?

None of us were in the room where it happened,
History gets made when we fill the gaps in,

It's hard to know where to put the Inquisition in our
story,
It lasted roughly 700 years, tragic, gory,
Most the of the millennia,
The details I won't fill in,
Thousands killed, millions scared,
Meanwhile colonization everywhere,

In 1493 the Papal Bulls
Give Portugal and Spain ownership of the "New World"
A whole new world
Where whole populations were "discovered",

The kind of destruction from which they never recover,
Church and state as bedfellows,
Warning lights red yellow,
Never a good plan,
But to understand
The story of the church we gotta know the parts that hurt,
Histories that are mortifying,
The things our ancestors did in the name of Christ, fortifying
The lust for land and human beings as property,
With the Bible as their weapon for copper, tea,
sugar, gold, lives, whatever they could get,
These abuses met with silence from a God whose vision we forget.

But not silence, the vision still writing, don't be subtle,
Large enough there's no rebuttal,
When the same truths crop up,
In every locale,
We're often recalcitrant, to listen
To God's vision
Feigning oblivion,
to what Jesus calls
The only command after all,
To love.

And the church needs her next reform,
The next iteration of this situation needs to be reborn.

Turns out they had a secret gift in the clergy camp,
Everyone give it up for the Protestant's problematic champ,

Martin Luther!

95 thoughts nailed down like a coffin

Calling in
His authority
On what we do on and off again,
What's Biblical and what's man-made tradition,
An extradition
Of all this money causing friction,
Practices he questions
Gives the Pope some mentions,
Stop papal indulgences, upend old abuses,
Martin's here and he's taking no excuses.
Zwingli comes to Zurich then in 1525,
The Bible – now in English! – Tyndale takes it live,
Calvin writes his Institutes and from Avila comes Teresa,
Right around when Leonardo paints the Mona Lisa,
It's sixteen eleven,
The King James Version up on the scene,
Just a few years before Galileo gets his work seen,
Obscene said the Catholic church, suggesting heliocentricity,
We won't tolerate such modern eccentricity!
Now let's hop across the ocean before the proverbial ax fall,
Can't relax at all...
The states call!
Revolution, Great Awakening,
Sinners in the hands of an angry God.
Fresh sod
Planting seeds of faith,
But use the rod.
Nice juxtaposition
It's in flux, in revision
John Newton writes Amazing Grace
Keep the pace,
England abolishes the trade
of the enslaved,

And new translations are being made
Revised Standard, English Revised
Now it's eighteen-eighty-five.
War, civil and uncivilized,
Then a few world wars,
But while the world is fighting,
The visionaries keep on writing.
Bonhoeffer writes bold vision,
Denounce the Nazis and their mission,
And hold the church to account for less vociferous resistance,
Cheap grace must be disavowed,
Unrepentant not allowed,
Church discipline as necessary as the cross
and Christ,
Makes it cost,
Can't give grace to ourselves,
Everybody listen.
He's martyred in 1945 but the words remain a vision

It's not til nineteen forty-seven that the dead sea scrolls are found,
Seems like ancient words of wisdom remain present and around,
Voices shouting out from underground.
Is the world still tuning in?
Depends on how we live the vision.
In forty nine Billy Graham led his first Crusade,
A shift in understanding just what a U.S. Christian made,
Elsewhere no aspect of the church is done changing,
Vatican two arrives to do some rearranging,
Latino theology,
A new ontology,
Understand power and suffering
And Freirean sociology.
Gutierrez gives a theology of liberation

No time for hesitation
The people are oppressed and Christ came to free all nations.
Women and men in the South and North,
make truth come forth,
Stay the path,
Discover grace over wrath,
Speak promises that last.
Let this style be a vessel
As we wrestle
With the notion that we'd ever understand how we got here,
All this commotion,
So much in motion,
Millions of men and women and emotion,
The journey of faith too big to encapsulate in one episodic take.

, So what's the point in rehearsing two-thousand years of history?
You've got google, it's not like anything's a mystery.
It's to remind us how we transform,
Not the norm,
For humans to persist in a belief even though it must reform.

It's 2020 and the world is deeply altered
This pandemic and unrest is no sign that God has faltered,
But we're gaining on November
So let's recall and remember,
To let the yoke we carry be a yoke to Christ,
Nothing else and nothing less,
And allow God's love to bless
Others through us, even in this mess.

We're still standing watch,
At our post, waiting, hesitating but still proclaiming God's the most,
Waiting, listening,

It's our conditioning,
Don't be fooled it doesn't tarry,
The promises of the son of Mary,
That in the end love is the only thing that remains, nothing strange,
That never changes,
Always growing and reforming,
Make the vision plain so we can see it running past
That God's love was always there and by God it's gonna last.

Sermon preached by Reverend Laurie Lyter Bright at First Congregational United Church of Christ, Appleton, Wisconsin
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Scripture Readings:

1 Peter 2:1-5, (95 Theses)

2 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. ²Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵like living stones, let yourselves be built ^ainto a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Habakkuk 2: 1-3

I will stand at my watchpost,
and station myself on the rampart;
I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,
and what he ^awill answer concerning my complaint.

²Then the LORD answered me and said:

Write the vision;
make it plain on tablets,
so that a runner may read it.

³For there is still a vision for the appointed time;
it speaks of the end, and does not lie.

If it seems to tarry, wait for it;
it will surely come, it will not delay.

Matthew 11:29-30

²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."