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Series: *Vision Sunday*

Title: *“What’s Better Than 20/20?” Faith is!*

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Scripture: 2nd Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1

2nd Corinthians 5:7 – “We walk by faith and not by sight.”

Hebrews 11:1 – “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

When I turned 16 a miracle happened. My parents agreed to let me buy a motorcycle. The young man who served as a volunteer youth director in our little church had one and I admired him and his cycle so much--- that more than anything I wanted one of my own. With his helpful influence, my parents miraculously agreed to the purchase. I found a slightly used Honda 100cc like this for \$300 and I bought it with my own money. Mine had a sissy bar—chrome, of course and I could not wait to ride it to church or school! All I had to do was pass a test to get my motorcycle license in Delaware, which I was sure would be no problem. I mean, I had studied the little book on which the test is based. I knew it from cover to cover. In fact, I aced the written test. But when I took the vision test, when I looked at that eye chart...I flunked because my vision was not good enough to make out the letters. I was, and still am, nearsighted.

That meant to get my license so I could ride my motorcycle I would have to get glasses. Which meant I needed to see an eye doctor; a two week wait to get an appointment. Then I had to order the glasses; another two-week wait. Then I had to go back and take the test at the DMV again. This time I passed and with 20/20 vision I happily zoomed around Dover, Delaware on my Honda.

This experience long ago taught me that eyesight can be a limiting thing!

How many of you have had to learn that same principle--you have to wear eye-glasses or contacts? You guys know by experience that there are things you can't see unless your eyes work well. Just curious---how many of you have 20/20 vision without glasses? Good for you, you are in the minority. Only 35% of people see 20/20 without glasses or corrective surgery. Of course, the way you find out your vision is the way I did when I was 16. You look at one of those eye-charts or you look at the electronic version. But speaking of that chart, I learned this week that the term “20/20 vision” is when a person can see what the average individual can on that eye chart from 20 feet away. If you have 20/30 vision, it means when you are standing 20 feet from the chart, you can read letters that most people see when they are 30 feet away.

You may ask, *“What is better than 20/20 vision? Is there any such thing?”* And I would say yes, there is. A person can have 20/15 vision, which is sharper than 20/20. If you have 20/15 vision, you can see a line in the eye chart at 20 feet that the average person can only see when they are 15 feet away. 20/10 vision is the ability to see what they can only make out at 10 feet. It's twice as good as 20/20. However, there are things that even people with 20/10 vision CANNOT see. There are things that the best of EYES cannot make out; things that are only seen through eyes of faith. And that leads me to what I believe is God's vision for our church for 2020. Our Heavenly Father wants us to embrace the kind of sight---the kind of vision---that only FAITH can perceive. So, to get to that question we've been building up to for the past six weeks, *“What is better than 20/20---**REALLY** better?”* Everyone say it: FAITH IS!

Now to embrace this vision we must understand that “faith” is an important word. In fact, I think there may be no more important word for the Christian than this one.

- James 1 says that faith is the means by which we receive anything from God.

- Hebrews 1 says without faith it is impossible to please God.

So, wouldn't you agree then that "faith" is an important concept for us to understand and practice as Christians? Everyone nod your head up and down. YES!

Okay, let's take a few minutes to try to get a handle on the meaning of this vitally important five letter word. Here's what some famous Christians down through the years have said about faith.

- George Muller said, *"Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. Faith begins where man's power ends."*
- Elisabeth Elliot said, *"True faith goes into operation when there are no answers."*

Those are great, but let me add a few things to help us understand this important word.

(1) First, faith GROWS.

It's like a muscle; the more we use it the bigger and stronger it becomes. When we trust God and obey Him even when we can't see why, He comes through. He rewards our faith. And that makes us have a deeper trust in Him, so we trust Him to enable us to do even greater things and so on. I think this is what Jesus was talking about in John 14 when He said, ***"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing...and they will do even greater things than these."***

In 1983 Lorne Whitehead published an article about the domino chain reaction. It's easy to picture because we all love to set up domino chains. You knock over a domino, and topples the one next to it and the one next to it...it sets off a chain reaction that can knock down hundreds of dominoes in a matter of seconds. The longer the chain, the more fun it is to watch. Well, in his research Whitehead discovered that a domino is capable of knocking over another domino that is one-and-a-half times its size. So, a two-inch domino can topple a three-inch domino. A three-inch domino can topple a four-and-a-half-inch domino. And a four-and-a-half-inch domino can topple a six and three quarters inch domino. And a six and three quarters inch domino can knock over---well, you get the point. But, by the time you get to the eighteenth domino, you could knock over the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Now, I know that's not as impressive because it's leaning. But, the twenty-third domino could knock over the Eiffel Tower. And by the time you get to the thirty-first domino, you could take down Mt. Everest itself.

Whitehead showed that, in the realm of mathematics, there are two types of progression: linear and geometric. Linear progression is two plus two equals four. Geometric progression is compound doubling. Two times two equals four. If you take thirty linear steps, you're ninety feet from where you started. But if you take thirty geometric steps, where you double the stride each time, you've circled the earth twenty-six times!

Well, faith isn't linear. Faith is geometric. Every decision we make, every step of faith we take, has a chain reaction. It helps us to see that with God we can do more than we ask or imagine---FAR more. And the MORE we see that, the bigger our faith—and the bigger the things we attempt for God. The more FAITHFUL we see God is; the more FAITHFUL we become. That leads me to mention something else.

(2) Faith PROTECTS.

Ironically, with faith we benefit from NOT playing it safe. Doing things that require faith; even though it's hard, even though we struggle, it protects us from the dangers that come with doing things the easy way. It's wrong---fatal in fact---for a church to just play it safe. Without faith we can do nothing for God; so without it our church would shrivel up and die.

Palmer Chichen and his brothers once traveled to the western edge of Zimbabwe to raft the Zambezi River. He writes, *"We boarded our raft at the base of the Victoria Falls. Massive amounts of water spilled over the top of the giant falls and dropped almost a thousand feet; the roar was deafening. The falls are the largest in the world, more than a mile wide and three hundred feet high. Mist from the spray that fills the air like fog can be seen for fifty miles; the locals call it 'Smoke That Thunders.' The water from the falls rushes down the gorge in torrents, creating the world's largest rapids. In the United States, the highest-class rapid you are allowed to raft is a Class 5. The Zambezi's whitewater rapids can top 7 and 8. As I sat on the edge of the eight-person raft, all suited up in a tight, overstuffed jacket and a thick crash helmet, I felt like an overcautious tourist about to mount an overpowered moped in Honolulu. The Zambezi can't be that dangerous, can it? But then our guide [said], 'When the raft flips...' There was no 'If the raft flips' or 'Or on the off chance we get flipped.' But 'When the raft flips.' He went on, '... stay in the rough water. You will be tempted to swim toward the stagnate water at the edge of the banks. Don't do it. Because it is in the stagnate water that the crocs wait for you. They are large and hungry. Even when the raft flips, stay in the rough water.'"*

Look how big this one is!

Well, in the same way stagnancy, or embracing the safe status quo, will kill a church. Those "calm parts of the river" are where Satan waits to pull us down. God needs His church to be a place of faith where people brave the "rapids of doing His will;" a healthy church is a place of risk. Finally, as I said earlier:

(3) Faith SEES.

Remember our text? Hebrews 11 says that ***"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*** Now, the phrases, ***"being sure"*** and ***"do not see"*** seem to contradict each other. But people who practice genuine faith know that there is no contradiction because the Bible teaches us that real faith anticipates. It visualizes the future in the present. It sees in advance. It believes God's purposes will prevail somewhere out there over the horizon, so it is being sure even of what we don't see. It's like Abraham who, ***"...when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."*** Matthew Henry put it this way, ***"Faith demonstrates to the eye of the mind the reality of those things which cannot be discerned by the eye of the body."***

I can't help but think of a clip from the third Indiana Jones movie. Indiana and his father are racing the Nazi's to find the Holy Grail, the cup Jesus drank from on the night of His arrest. They find its location but to get to it you have to pass three tests. To force Indiana to go through those tests and get the cup, the Nazi's shoot his father. Only water from the cup will save him---this is not Biblical of course. Watch this familiar scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBBbq2g7yf8>

This scene illustrates the truth that faith is taking a step even when we can't see where our foot will land. It's seeing the unseen.

Okay, with all that in mind, what does faith enable us to see for 20/20? What things does it show us that mere eyesight doesn't? Our staff and church council have prayerfully set up five faith goals---things SO BIG we need faith to accomplish them---things we believe God is calling us to do in the coming year.

How many of you have heard of a BHAG? Right---it's an acronym for a "Big Hairy Audacious Goal." It's like when Alex Honnold decided he would climb El Capitan with no ropes. That's the kind of FAITH goals we have set for 2020---things only be accomplished by relying on our faith in God. In fact, I've come up with a term for us. Instead of BHAGS, these are BHAF's---Big Hairy Audacious Faith-Goals.

Here they are:

BHAF #1 – Start FIVE NEW GRACE GROUPS.

Since this is Kevin's area of responsibility, I've asked him to share this one.

This is probably the most important BHAF, because as you'll see, making disciples helps with all the rest and that brings us to BHAF #2:

BHAF #2 – 5,000 Faith Conversations.

The faith-goal is for us to talk about our faith with others a total of 5,000 times in 20/20. This is indeed a BHAF because the sad fact is the vast majority of Christians NEVER share their faith, they never reproduce themselves spiritually. They are like the foolish steward who buried his talent in the ground instead of growing it. I have faith that that can change, that Redland can be a place where EVERYONE shares the gospel. Now, to be clear, this doesn't mean you share the plan of salvation a total of 5,000 times--although that would be wonderful! No, the goal is for us to simply talk about our faith with another person; a neighbor, a co-worker, a family member, 5,000 times. Those talks may LEAD to sharing how to become a Christian and they may not.

I have to stop at this point and say, a great place to have faith conversations is by volunteering in ESL or KAIROS or Open Night Basketball or Upward or Grace in Store, places where you will have several opportunities to talk about faith. It could even happen next summer if you volunteer to welcome Coach Harwood and his guys to their basketball camp. By the way, I just had 8 faith conversations with my Upward team and will every practice for the next 12 weeks.

Now, we have an average of 400 in worship here at RBC--that means each of you would have to engage in a faith conversation 12.5 times during the next year, a little over once a month. To make sure we're on the same sheet of music, what counts? What is a "faith conversation?"

- It's one in which you share your belief about God with someone.
- It's when you tell the difference Jesus has made in your life.
- It's when you share a verse of Scripture and why it's meaningful to you.
- It's where you ask someone about their faith.
- It's when you invite someone to church and talk about the service afterwards.

Hopefully, those conversations will open the door for you to lead someone to Jesus. But they may just be one of a series of similar conversations. You may lead a person from being a negative 10 to a negative 5 and someone else leads them to a negative 3 and someday someone else in the chain finally leads that person to pray and:

- Admit their sin.
- Say they Believe Jesus is God's Son Who died for their sin
- Confess their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

We're going to track these 5,000 conversations with marbles. We'll get a big jar like this and give it a prominent place here in the Sanctuary and once a month in worship we will have a time to "move your marbles;" putting one in the jar for each faith conversation you had in the prior month. I have faith by the end of the year we'll see that marble jar full to overflowing and more importantly, we'll see the fruit of those conversations. Fruit like more of us becoming more passionate about evangelism and more people coming to Jesus.

BHAF #3 – Make our "Sweet, Sweet Spirit" even Sweeter.

Now, you may think this isn't that big of a faith goal because you already enjoy a deep fellowship here. You have lots of friends that stick closer than a brother or a sister. But that's not the case for all of us; especially

our newer members. And even those of us who have close friends need to expand our friend group. So, the idea is to challenge you all to get to know each other better, to share your lives with others in spite of the business of this county that makes that so difficult. I have faith that in the coming year, NO ONE will come to me and say, "Mark---I don't feel like I fit in here. I don't have any friends."

Now, there are lots of ways to make this BHAF happen.

- Serve on one of our mission trips. There is nothing like sharing a dorm and meals for a week and a common mission objective when it comes to bonding with others. So, go with us to Puerto Rico or Ocean City this year.
- Get in a Grace Group! About 100 of you don't go to Sunday Morning Bible Study. You just attend worship. Add a Grace Group to your schedule because in that's where you meet weekly to study the Bible and as you do you really get to know people.
- Participate in our Summer Small Groups. Sue and I have LOVED the small groups that have met in our home the past two summers. It's a GREAT way to deepen fellowship. We've even talked about having reunions.
- Join Sue and me on our trip to The Cove this year. We're taking a group back next October 12-14.

Irwin Lutzer, former pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, will be the speaker and his topic fits our vision perfectly. Here it is: "Faith at the Breaking Point – Lessons from the Lives of Biblical Heroes" The conference including meals and lodging is about \$600 per couple. Here's a pic of our last group. Ask them how much they enjoyed going with us last year.

Those are some ideas. Here's one more and it's one challenge ALL of you to join. It's a game that someone on our Church Council---I can't remember who---came up with. It's called "Pictorial Directory Bingo." Our new directories are coming out soon and I am challenging you to have dinner in your home or their home with the people on your directory page. You win by doing that with everyone in your horizontal row or your vertical row or better yet, the entire page. So with this page as an example: The Thomas family could win if they share a meal with the Summers the Straceners and the Stewarts; or Marlin and the Swains; or with all them AND both Struthers, the Soneburners, Judi and Aris, the Sternfelds, and Sylvia Smith. In that case EVERYONE wins. I look forward to hearing some "people bingo" testimonies in the months to come.

BHAF #4 – EVERYONE INVOLVED IN MINISTRY.

We did some math as a staff meeting and figured out that it takes about 18,000 volunteer hours to make all the ministries of Redland happen. That's about 45 hours per member per year. This is what it takes to staff MANNA, ESL, Grace-in-Store, Upwards, Brooke Grove, AWANA, Fuel, Nursery, Extended session, OCC, Choirs, Grace Groups, Kairos, etc. Now, many of us do way more than 45 hours per week---this BHAF doesn't apply to you. So you can take a much-deserved nap for a few minutes. Continuing on...

Most of us do something. You might be at say 20 hours per year. And some of us, sadly, do nothing. The BHAF challenge is to get all of us involved; so pick something from the list I mentioned. Okay, those of you who I said could take a nap---wake up because on top of all the ministry we do here, we want to give ALL of us opportunities to do ministry hours OUTSIDE our campus. With that in mind we are going to set up a COMMUNITY SERVICE DAY to get out there and help the people of our community, doing things like:

- Cleaning windshields at the Red Mill Shopping Center
- Taking a meal to the Fire Station.
- Providing lunch for RMS staff.

If you have suggestions, let me know. Okay that's BHAF's 1-4. Are you ready for one more?

Everyone awake? Good. Here it is:

BHAF #5 – PAY OFF THE ROC.

At the moment our Mortgage is about \$573K and that's a great accomplishment. I mean, the building cost us \$4 million ten years ago so to get it down to that level this fast is wonderful. Now, if we do nothing new---just keep paying at the current rate, the ROC will be paid off in about five years. I'd like us to pay it off in two or LESS. Doing so would free up \$14K per month and save the church thousands of dollars in finance charges.

With our turnover rate, most of you weren't here when we had the capital campaign to finance the ROC. That campaign raised a little over \$2 million. The ROC has and still is a WONDERFUL blessing. It gives us our kitchen and fellowship hall aka ROC FOYER. It gives us our gym which makes possible Upward Sports, Rumpus at the ROC, Sr. Adult Exercise, Tang Soo Do, and so much more.

So I want all of us to pray as a family and decided on your own BHAF. Set a BHAF goal amount to give toward our mortgage. This is money you will give above and beyond your tithes. I challenge you to set an amount that requires FAITH. We'll talk more about this early next year---we may even have a pledge day---but you don't have to wait. Your offering envelope already has a blank for you to designate money to the ROC debt. So go ahead and use the blank! Sandy says if we give \$132K a year, in addition to our mortgage payments we will pay off the note in two years. One of our Church Council members said, *"In order to pay off the ROC you have to rock the vision"* and that's what I'm doing. I have faith we can do this and each of our BHAF's.

Now, I want you to take the insert out of your bulletin. Fill it out. It has two parts. One part is to keep in your wallet. The other part is for you to fill out. This is your chance to say, *"Yes---I have the faith to SEE these goals met in 2020. I'll do my part!"* In a moment I'm going to ask you to bring your completed cards up to the front and lay them on the altar. When you do, we have a pair of Redland Red glasses for each of you. The lenses are clear, so they are a reminder of the fact that we don't need prescription lenses to see what God has called us to do. At the end of the service we're going to take a picture of our entire church wearing these glasses---a visual reminder of our commitment to this year's vision. Now, if you're visiting, looking for a church home, you've come on the perfect Sunday. You know what God has called us to do and if God is calling you to join us--leave your seat and come to me or Kevin asking to join Redland. We'd love to have you! If you have never professed your faith in Christ, do so today! Come share that with me. Okay, everyone understand? Come now as we stand and sing.