

“What Will Be Revealed”  
1 John 3:1-7  
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ECF is a patient church. Patient in discerning God’s vision, patient with its leaders as we try to translate that vision into a plan for successful action. You have a tolerance for ambiguity that would make John proud, the same John who wrote to an anxious group of believers to take heart, that their identity as children of God was secure, and that all would be revealed in due time. “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” Translated: Y’all need to be patient, go about your business, and leave the worrying to God; everything is under control.

The revelation of which John writes is most likely the revelation of Jesus Christ when he returns in glory. Ever watchful, the church waits expectantly, hopeful to remain faithful for that glorious day, even if they weren’t sure exactly what was going to happen when it arrived. That uncertainty was taking its toll among the faithful as false teachers were taking advantage of the anxiety by spinning their own versions of the truth for their own ends. And so John writes exhorting them to remain faithful to the original teachings about Jesus even though their leaders didn’t have all the answers at that very moment.

And so it is that I and the Council seek your patience and your faithfulness as we begin the final phase of creating a plan for our ministry together, a plan that is faithful to our mission to be the heart, hands, and voice of Jesus Christ, and to God's vision of a world of travelers, safely home. Over these last two years, your energy and commitment to this process have been inspiring, and I hope you are as pleased with the results as I am. Now, we are entering the home stretch, when we put it all together, when what we will be is revealed. And when that vision of a world of travelers, safely home is brought to completion, "we will be like him, for we will see him as he is," for we too will have arrived safely home.

As with the other parts of this process, the participation of the entire congregation is crucial. Especially in this final phase, when we are deciding how to use our individual gifts in service of others, and in which areas of the life of the church to invest, your best and brightest ideas will be invaluable. That is why the process we will be using is designed from the very beginning to seek and honor your participation. My first thought was to share with you the highlights of this method, but it was quickly followed by my second thought, which was that I wanted you to stay awake for the rest of what I have to say, so I decided instead to tell you a story which will, I hope, illustrate at least the basics. Those of you for whom dissertations on methods of strategic planning are light reading may feel free to see me later about the nuts and bolts, but for the rest of you, here is how the story goes:

Once upon a time there was a little boy who found himself a long, long way from home. He longed to return to the comfort of his family, and especially his dog Woody, with whom he loved to play down by the riverside. But as hard as he tried and as much as he wanted to, he just couldn't seem to find his way to the place he wanted to be. He looked for the route in cities, and through farms, and even tried crossing mountains, but he never seemed to get any closer. He even began to think about giving up and just staying right where he was, all alone.

One day, as he was walking through a park, he saw a man sitting on one of the benches, playing with a dog that looked so much like his own dog, Woody, that he just had to go over and pet the dog. The man on the bench was very kind and let him play for a long time with his dog. When he was tired, the boy sat down on the bench and the two began to talk. "So, do you live around here?" asked the man on the bench, to which the boy replied, "No, but I am searching for the way back to my home, and family, and especially my dog Woody."

"But why don't you just go there straightaway? What are you waiting for?" asked the man on the bench. But the boy replied sadly, "Because I cannot read the language of this strange place, and I am not strong enough to climb the mountains, and I have no one to help me keep me safe from the bandits." "Well, do you have a plan?" asked the man on the bench. And the boy replied, "No, I have no plan, but I think if I just keep trying, I'll get there sooner or later."

“That is a very interesting idea,” said the man on the bench. “But from the sound of things, I would want to get there sooner than later. Woody must really miss you.” And at that, the boy became very sad, because he was afraid he would never see Woody again. When he saw how sad the boy had become, the man on the bench reached into his bag and pulled out a large piece of paper and spread it out in front of the boy. “Do you see this map?” he asked. “I drew this map myself and it took me a very long time. But here I am at home, and this map helped me get here. Do you think you could draw a map like this for yourself?”

The boy looked puzzled. He had never thought about making a map. He had always hoped someone would just give him a map with his route marked out clearly, but no one ever had, and that is why he simply walked and walked and never arrived home. He took the map and looked at it very carefully. On the map he saw squiggly lines, and circles, squares and stars, and even lists and notes. It was unlike any map he had ever seen. “This map helped you get home?” he asked. “It doesn’t look like any map I’ve ever seen.”

“Yes, you are right,” said the man on the bench. “This map is like no other map in all the world. It got me home, but it cannot help get you or anyone else home. You see, this map was designed just for me. And you need a map designed just for you. Would you like a map like that?”

The boy nearly knocked over the bench he was so excited. Yes, he wanted a map like that map. “How do I make a map like this one?” he asked. “Well,” said

the man on the bench, “the first thing you have to do is close your eyes and see the place where you want to go.” And so the boy closed his eyes and saw his dog Woody by the riverside, and his parents at their dinner table, and even his sister Alice reading a book like she always did. And all these images made the boy very happy, and even more determined to make it home. “OK, I see them. Now what?”

The man on the bench said, “Well, you told me that you cannot read the language in these strange lands, that you are not strong enough to climb the mountains, and that you have no one to protect you from the bandits, that your mind, body, and spirit all need a little help? Is that right?” he asked. And after the boy nodded, the man on the bench said, “Well, then that is where you will begin. And we will start with the bandits. So I am going to ask you a few questions. Are you ready?” And the boy said, “Yes, I am ready.”

“Then close your eyes and tell me, if you could have the perfect bodyguard to protect you from the bandits, what would he or she look like?” The boy squeezed his eyelids together very tightly. “Well, my bodyguard would be very strong, and very smart, and very brave. And he or she would have armor and a shield, and know how to fight off the bandits.”

“Is that all?” asked the man on the bench. “Well, I suppose it would be nice if my bodyguard could comfort me when I get scared, and teach me how be strong, and smart, and brave too. And if that person could tell jokes and juggle, that would be great too.”

“Should this person walk on water, too?” asked the man on the bench.

“Well, I guess that would be asking a lot, wouldn’t it,” said the boy sheepishly.

“Yes, it would, but I think you have a pretty good idea who would make a good bodyguard. Now all we have to do is find him or her. How do you think you can do that?”

“I guess I don’t know,” said the boy, starting to feel sad again. But the man on the bench smiled and said, “Well, I have good news for you. I know some people who can help you find out where to get your bodyguard.” And the man on the bench pulled out his cellphone and dialed several numbers and a few minutes later, four people came running up to the bench. “Let me introduce you to some of my friends,” said the man on the bench. This is Bruno, and he used to be a bodyguard, but he is retired now. And this is Margaret. She knows the people in charge of all the Associations of Bodyguards. Randall here, he is a very good judge of character, and Melissa once used a bodyguard to get home herself. I think these people can help you figure out how and where to find a bodyguard for yourself, now that you know what you are looking for.”

So Bruno, Margaret, Randall, and Melissa shared with the boy all their best ideas for finding the perfect bodyguard that the boy had described. Then they decided among them which were the best ideas, which should be done first, and which could be done with the money the boy had left to spend. And when they had

finished, they drew some charts and pictures and wrote all this down in one corner of a large piece of paper at the top of which was written, “MY MAP.”

After the bodyguard advisors had said goodbye, the man on the bench said, “Now we’ll do the same about learning the language, and getting you strong enough to climb the mountains,” and so they did. And when all the work was done, the boy had the most amazing map, full of squiggly lines, and circles, squares and stars, and even lists and notes, just like the map of the man on the bench, only different. When the time came for the boy to leave for home, the man on the bench blessed him, and sent him on his way with the map that he was absolutely, positively sure would lead him home, and back to his family, and especially his dog, Woody. The end.

“Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed.” Friends, those words were written about the end of time, whenever that may be, but they can also refer to our own time, and I believe they do. What we will be is nearly revealed, and will be revealed through our shared efforts. For the moment, what we need is a team of eight to ten people willing to lead the drawing of OUR MAP, eight to ten people who will see this task through until the end, and who will have the patience for the meetings and conversations which will be required to put the pieces together. If you are just such a map maker, please make yourself known to me in the course of the next week, and together we’ll get started on ECF’s plan make our way home and to be reunited with Woody the dog. Amen.