

“The Eyes of Christ”

In spite of his pain and suffering, Job cries out: ***“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”***

This past Sunday, we heard a somewhat longer version of this same Gospel reading — the narrative of Jesus healing a man born blind. I chose on Sunday to focus my attention on the response of this man to Jesus in calling Jesus a “prophet.” But the story has many foci, not the least of which is: *“What does it mean to see?”*

We hear in this evening’s First Lesson (also read on Sunday) how God counsels Samuel about the way he, God, looks at things. ***“ . . . the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”*** God was concerned that Samuel might be swayed by good looks, athletic build, a charming smile.

Such measures of human desirability certainly are not confined to twenty-first century America. Oh, we have our celebrities (our royalty, as it were); and they are often adored because they have a certain look. Some have other talents — the ability to sing, or act, or dance, perhaps — but there are many who become famous purely because of their looks.

When Samuel was sent to anoint the new king in place of Saul, and encountered the son of Jesse, Eliab, he is cautioned: ***“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature . . .”*** Which is precisely where we would look first. Our eyes take in everything first. I, for one, would question why God didn’t just instruct Samuel: *“Go up to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse, and ask for his youngest boy. Anoint him as the new king.”* It surely would have simplified matters.

Instead, we have this drawn-out process of Jesse parading his sons, one by one, in front of Samuel, with the prophet, in effect, looking up to

heaven with each of them: *“This one?”* The only reason I can think of why God might have Samuel do things this way is to teach Samuel the lesson, that we humans cannot see into people, and that we tend to make superficial judgments.

How many people who voted in the last election voted for people whose positions they had studied, whose character they had investigated, and whose abilities they had researched? Not many, I would hazard. Far too many filled in that little oblong marker because they liked the look of that candidate, or recognized the name (or at least thought they did!), or kind of remembered hearing something about him or her (but can’t quite remember what that was).

Studies have shown that, in our culture at least (and the evidence of today’s First Lesson strongly suggests it is a more universal human condition), people tend to regard the attractive among us as smarter, better leaders, and more trustworthy. Until they encounter someone like Jessica Simpson, and every blond joke becomes personified . . . or run into a Dan Quayle (so much for leadership) . . . or get duped by a good-looking con artist (by the way, are you ready to mail in your junk gold that just lying around gathering dust?).

God *“looks on the heart . . .”* I was first struck by the preposition in that passage: I would have expected to find that God *“looks into the heart”* (and several translations do read that way). Translation is interpretation . . . but I became more fascinated when I checked the Hebrew and discovered the literal translation for this entire passage: *“man looks for the eyes, but Yahweh looks for the heart.”* The sense of it is what the NRSV has produced: we look on the outside, God looks in deeper.

But Jesus taught us: *“Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness.”* [Luke 11:34] So I think there is something more at work here than just that we are too superficial in our judgments. I think God was teaching Samuel (and through Samuel teaching us) that, even when we try to gain a deeper insight into another person (looking at the

eyes), we can get only a piece of the picture. But God gets into our skins with us, and sees us for what we really are.

This is what Jesus did, as well. ***“As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.”*** John writes. When the eyes of Christ saw his blindness, He had compassion on him. Many of our Lord's healings began with Jesus simply seeing the need with compassionate eyes. Jesus often responded without even being asked, simply because the love in the eyes of Christ prompted him to act. When the widow of Nain was burying her only son, Jesus saw her and had compassion on her and raised her son to life. When Jesus entered Peter's house; he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying sick with a fever and he healed her.

Yes, the eyes of Christ often saw the malady and responded with sympathy, tenderness, and understanding by initiating the forgiveness of sins and healing of the affliction. Because the eyes of Christ saw into the person, not just what was presented to Him. The eyes of Christ saw much misery and he responded with concern, mercy, and pity. ***“When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them, for they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.”*** [Matthew 9:36]

For our meditation this evening we will consider the miracles of love and grace that resulted from what the eyes of Christ saw. To do that, perhaps we can think about the eyesight of Jesus as if it were our own. Our eyesight is a great gift from God. People who have the full use of all five of the physical senses generally acknowledge that if they lost any one sensory perception, they would miss their eyesight the most.

So much of what we love comes to us through our eyes. With our eyes we see the beauty of a sunrise and the splendor of a sunset. We recognize the vastness of the night sky filled with sparkling stars. We look upon the delicate beauty of a flower bathed in morning dew. These are things the eyes of Christ saw also.

With our eyes we enjoy the satisfaction of a task completed after much effort, the pleasure of a job well-done. Our eyes behold the smiles of our

loved ones. They watch with delight the friskiness of a new baby colt frolicking in a field. Our eyes shine with elation at the ruggedness of the view from a mountain top. These are things the eyes of Christ saw also.

We gaze with joy upon the fresh green verdure of new grass on the hills in spring. We behold the fury and power of a storm. We witness the wonder of the hush that comes over a baby as it sleeps in the arms of a parent. These are things the eyes of Christ saw also.

Our eyes savor the sight of a sparkling stream of diamonds as water in a brook tumbles over rocks in the sunshine. With our eyes we ponder the calm stillness of a fog as mist clings to the trees. Our sight gives us the amiable cheerfulness of a fire shared with a circle of friends. These are things the eyes of Christ saw also.

The eyes of Christ saw the same variety of beauty that our eyes see. But they also saw the same ugliness and violence that our eyes see. The eyes of Christ saw the hate and rejection of brothers and sisters for one another. Jesus recognized the cruelty that pent-up hate can unleash on someone. His eyes discerned the dishonesty, deception and deceitfulness of people. They beheld the squalor and filthiness of the poor whom he loved. The eyes of Christ observed the selfishness and pride of the rich, and he loved them too.

Yet the eyes of Christ were able to see more than the transitory and frail objects that our eyes see, able to look beyond this temporary world to the Kingdom of God. Jesus proclaimed, ***“Whoever sees me, sees him who sent me . . . Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”*** (John 12:45; 14:9) Even as He was crucified, as He saw the soldiers dividing His garments, and saw His mother's grief, He still could see the value of each person there. He saw them as children of God to the end, for he said, ***“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”***

When we are faced with a serious situation and struggling with a difficult decision perhaps we can remember how the eyes of Christ saw his tormentors. We could ask ourselves, *“What would the eyes of Christ see*

in this dilemma?” When we see those who oppose us or dislike us, we could ask, *“How would the eyes of Christ see this person?”*

We do need to see more clearly, not with our self-oriented eyes but with the new eyes of Christ. We need to see Jesus dying on the cross for us. When we see him on the cross, we see the Father. When we see the eyes of Christ closing in agony, we see the love of God. When we see him bleeding and dying, we see the power of righteousness over sin. When we see the eyes of Christ closed in the darkness of death and a tomb, we see the power of love over hate. When we see the eyes of Christ opened in the resurrection, we see the power of life over death.

Stephen Seamands writes of an encounter between his pastor friend, Dick, and a woman in his congregation:

“When she was a young girl, Jackie's father had sexually abused her. The wounds of those childhood experiences had produced a deep sense of self-loathing in her and led to an adulthood of promiscuity. However, as she grew in her new-found faith in Christ and counseled with her pastor, God enabled her not only to forgive her father but also to forgive herself. As a result, God was mending her brokenness, and she was beginning to love and accept herself.

Then one day Jackie literally burst into Dick's office. She sobbed and shook as she recounted what had happened the day before. Her father had been waiting for her when she arrived home. He had deliberately come at a time when he knew they would be alone. Then he had proceeded to force himself on her, threatening to molest Jackie's twelve-year-old daughter if she didn't submit to him. Terrified for her daughter and trapped once again by her childhood nightmare, Jackie froze as her own father once again assaulted her.

The horror of that violent experience threw Jackie back into an abyss of despair, shattering her growing self-esteem. Waves of worthlessness swept over her. All the progress she had made was seemingly reversed.

As Dick listened to Jackie he was silently praying. What could he

possibly say that wouldn't seem trite in such a tragic situation? But the Holy Spirit prompted him to do something unusual. Inviting Jackie to accompany him, he led her out of his office and into the sanctuary. They walked together down the center aisle until they stood facing the cross that hung over the chancel.

'Jackie,' Dick said emphatically, 'I want you to look at the cross. All your life you've believed a lie about who you are and what you are worth. Your father's despicable actions when you were a child and then yesterday are a part of the lie. Satan, the father of lies, has used those things to convince you that you're worthless and no good.'

'Jackie, look at the cross. It's the only place in all the universe where you'll find the truth about yourself. Jesus died for you. That's how much he thinks you are worth. He loves you so much he gave his life for you. Look at the cross, Jackie, look at the cross.'

As she gazed at the cross, the truth revealed there penetrated Jackie's heart and mind. She rejected the lie of her own worthlessness and believed the truth that she was in fact loved and worthwhile. The cloud of despair and self-loathing began to dissipate.

Jackie walked out of the sanctuary that day a changed person. Derailed by what had happened, she saw herself in the light of the cross and, bathed in that redeeming light, got back on track. In the months following, she continued to progress in her healing and faith journey.

Accepted. Beloved. Of infinite worth to God. That's what the cross tells us about ourselves. No rejection, anywhere or anytime, can ever change that."

Because Christ has looked within; His eyes have beheld us as we really are . . . and His love for us has remained undiminished. Jesus has promised that the His eyes will look upon us again. ***"So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."*** (John 16:22) The eyes of Christ are upon you. Look at the cross, and see His love for you. Amen.