

“Do You See...?”
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2 Samuel 11:26-12:10,13-15; Galatians 2:15-21; Luke 7:36-8:3
June 13, 2010

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! AMEN The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

I’d like you to take a moment right now and think of all the people you see everyday without really seeing them at all; people about whom you make a few assumptions and then dismiss them as unimportant details as you rush off to your next errand. Would you recognize the cashier at the grocery store if you saw them on the street? How about the teller at the bank? Do you know the faces, but not the names of your neighbors down the street?

So many people we see regularly are just part of the scenery to us; as we are to them. Sounds cold but it is realistic. But think of it this way: C.S. Lewis once wrote “Every person you see – every person – is either becoming someone so beautiful you cannot imagine how beautiful they will be in the glories of heaven or someone so incredibly grotesque you cannot imagine how horrible they will be for eternity.” Do you see people that way?

Jesus asks this question, in His manner, halfway through the Gospel for this morning when He says to Simon the Pharisee, “Do You See...?” this woman. Do You See...?” is our question for discussion this morning.

It is also the point of the parable Nathan shared with David. King David, who hadn’t gone out to war in spring, as kings are wont to do, had seen another man’s wife taking her bath on the roof, Bathsheba by name. The palace was up high – above the rooftops that were supposed to provide women privacy for their baths. David took what he saw – what he wanted – and then tried to cover the tracks of his wanton covetousness and lust.

Mind you, Bathsheba didn’t have a choice – women didn’t in that culture especially when it came to the king. And while it seems odd that Nathan would have to confront King David with a very thinly veiled parable remember that his life was in David’s hand, as well, and drawing him into the story of the poor man and his lamb – this King who’d been a shepherd boy and loved and nurtured little lambs holding them in his arms and calling them by name– well it was wise on many levels. You can almost feel the heat as David’s righteous anger boiled over until he vowed (As the Lord lives!!!) to punish that pitiless poacher. And then comes the indictment: “you are that man!”

How could David not see himself? How blind aren’t all of us to our own faults? Now-a-days we call that “denial.” Denial works because it is easier to erect a wall to hide from the truth, to hide from ourselves, than to face our faults and failures and do something about them.

“Do You See...?” “You are that man!” Nathan continues with a prophecy of great sorrow and consequence and in the part just after our text we read that David cries out to God for

repentance and is assured that his sin has been set aside and he will live. Consequences, yes, but forgiveness and restoration!

What great kindness, healing, or words of forgiveness had passed between Jesus and the woman at his feet? We don't know. There is no real clue as to why she follows Rabbi Jesus into the courtyard of a rich man's house weeping and throwing herself at His feet and wetting them with her tears, breaking a precious vial of ointment to anoint Him. Anointing was for the head, you see, not for dusty be-bunioned feet that might have even needed a nail trim a veritable Palestinian pedicure, if you will.

It's odd of Jesus to ask Simon, "Do you see her?" Everyone saw her – out-of-place, behaving inappropriately, causing a commotion, doing unlikely and rather unseemly things. But Jesus was asking a far-ranging question that wasn't answered when Simon had said in his heart or in a whisper, "I see a sinner. Why can't Jesus?"

Oh there's a whole lot of not seeing going on in this Gospel. Simon, for example, didn't really see Whom he'd invited as a guest that night. You could tell that by the way Jesus was treated: no welcome, no greeting kiss, no footbath, no ointment for sunburned skin. Those were social customs, never taken for granted; never not done for an invited guest unless that guest was someone obviously beneath you, not worthy of honor, someone who should be grateful just to have passed through your door. Did Simon see how transparent his actions were? Do you see...yourself?

I don't know, but I think Simon was too busy not seeing something else. Now you need to know that back then, the wealthy in general and the Pharisees in particular had a kind of noblesse oblige about them; since in their own eyes, they were the best of the best, they indulged that snobby compulsion putting themselves "out there" where their piety could be seen and imitated by the "little people."

So, as Pharisees dined in open air dining rooms, people could come from off the street just to watch and maybe learn from their gracious behavior. Perhaps that was Simon's motive for the courtyard interaction. Here was an opportunity for all to see Jesus as a fraud, as a "friend of sinners" so he treats Jesus as being beneath him. Now, in theory, we all like that idea of Jesus being a "friend of sinners," because it means Jesus is willing to be our friend. Think of it, at its simplest, it's just like *Facebook* and Jesus is the ultimate One who doesn't refuse a "friending request." But nobody who was anybody in the Pharisee's world wanted to be a sinner's friend and if we're honest with ourselves – well, even the church growth experts tell us churches thrive if they are "homogeneous units." People, even Christian people are sociologically drawn to people they see as "like themselves."

Simple Simon – he could spot an obvious sinner but he couldn't see that he was one, as well so Jesus has to confront him. "Do you see this woman?" Do you see a person, a daughter of Abraham, a child of God, a broken and contrite heart with nothing to offer but her devotion; a lost soul, not a perfect soul, but a SINNER!

You know, honestly, people don't talk about sin much anymore. Paul didn't shy away from talking to the Galatians. God set aside our sins by setting them on Jesus who took on all the shame, all the disgrace, all the public humiliation that this Simon was willing to heap on this woman, that it is easy to heap on people who, well, aren't like us – don't share our particular tastes.

“Do you see this woman?” Jesus asked. Oh, Simon saw her. He saw a piece of human garbage, a woman to be judged by her deeds and whose deeds placed her way beyond redemption in his opinion. This, coupled with the parable of the two debtors is a very discomfoting scene. It asks uncomfortable questions of each of us.

Do I love much because I have been forgiven much? Or like Simon, do you look in the mirror and see someone who's not half-bad? Honestly I think most people, even most Christian people, look at themselves and feel they're not “half-bad” all on their own. Even washed, redeemed, cleansed of all our sins Christians find it is easier to look at others in judgment, to compare and condemn than to see the world through tear washed eyes of love and reach out to share that love, invest it in the lives of other sinners – for that is what we all are.

Loving that way – without judgment and with a willingness to embrace and understand those who the world tells us are too different and beneath us comes with too great a cost for all of us – a price we're not willing to pay. An alabaster jar of ointment could cost a whole year's wages – it was saved for your burial. To use it on Jesus' feet was a profligate waste – certainly not “green” in use of resources. Funny, how the rich man, Simon, is stingy with Jesus and a woman – a woman of all things,(they were thought of like possessions or cattle)a woman is extravagantly wasteful.

“Do you see...?” “Do you see the people around you in need of Jesus' love? People in need of the forgiveness and restoration only Jesus can give? Can you set aside your judgment and love them extravagantly – discover what their riches are instead of weighing their gifts and talents against your own? Do you see the lost walking by you every day? Will you love them no matter what the cost?

This is the season of graduations and I read a blessing for graduates this week that I'd like to leave you with as you mull the answers to the difficult “Do you see...”question we've been discussing this morning.

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within your heart!

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of all people so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace!

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and from the terrors of war so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy!

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in the world.

In Jesus' name! Amen.

Now may our God who always, for Jesus' sake, judges us with mercy, inspire us to speak His truth and anoint us for lives of faith and service so the eternity changing Gospel might be shared.