

Sermon - Sun August 29, 2021

James 1:17-27

Mark 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

Let us pray, Gracious God, fill us with such yearning for the new life you promise for ourselves and for all of creation, that we reach for you and find you in surprising ways and places, following the way of Jesus Christ. Amen. (Living the Christ Life, p.204)

The Christ Mirror: Reflecting God's Love

In the Bible readings this morning, we hear a focus on do's and don'ts. And we hear a lot of talk about rules and laws and obeying.

We already live with a lot of do's and don'ts in our lives and since the pandemic struck, these do's and don'ts have exponentially increased. But in terms of the pandemic, we know that the extra do's and don'ts that have implemented around us, and asked of us, are all for the purpose of keeping us safe and for the protection of the common good, particularly the most vulnerable among us.

What grabbed my attention in the reading from James was the reference to the mirror, where it says, *“Those who listen to God's word but don't put it into practice are like those who look into mirrors at their own faces; they look at themselves, then go off and promptly forget what they looked like. But those who look steadily at the perfect law of freedom and make it their habit—not listening and then forgetting, but actively putting it into practice—will be blessed in all they do.”*

What we don't realize is that this Bible reading is using a common image from ancient literature that listeners of that time would have been very familiar with. The image from ancient literature is one of gazing into a mirror for the purpose of self-reflection and self-improvement. The reading is a making a reference to someone looking into the mirror and only seeing what is on the outside, without considering what is on the inside, such as someone's values, intentions, and motivations. That's what is meant when we hear, *“they*

look at themselves, then go off and promptly forget what they looked like.”

This statement is made in contrast to those who gaze into a mirror, with the intention of serious self-reflection – in other words, there is an emphasize and attention paid to what is on the inside: for example, our values, our characteristics, our intentions and motivations – what is in our hearts. This is what is meant when we hear, *“But those who look steadily at the perfect law of freedom and make it their habit—not listening and then forgetting, but actively putting it into practice—will be blessed in all they do.”*

This Bible reading is emphasizing the importance of self-reflection and paying attention to what is on the inside. We also hear in the gospel reading, that Jesus is saying that it’s what is on the inside that is most important.

But image and appearances are important to our culture, aren’t they? And we all get caught up in that. Even myself. For example, those of you who have been coming to in-person worship, have seen me fanning myself to keep cool throughout the service on these hot summer Sundays. It is true that I wouldn’t be as hot if I simply chose to not wear an alb. But there have been 3 reasons I have been wearing an alb all summer, even on hot days:

1. I’ve wanted to show off the stole that the congregation gifted to me, made by Karen Schultz to commemorate the 20th anniversary of my ordination.

2. Pastor Dennis has been wearing his alb all summer. If he can do it, I can do it.

3. I like hiding under the alb.

When I am wearing an alb, I don’t have to worry if my clothes are wrinkled, I don’t have to worry if I’ve remembered to shave my legs. I don’t have to wonder, will you know I’ve had this skirt for over 20 years? Can you tell I only paid \$10 for this one at Value Village?

I'm sure most of you couldn't care less about any of that, but the truth is image and appearance are important to our culture and many of us are inevitably affected by that.

Image and appearance are important in our culture. Stand in line in any grocery store and this becomes obvious. Every magazine you will pass either reflects the latest fashions for home decor, clothes or hair, or reflecting various images of celebrities with perfectly youthful faces, perfectly coiffed hair, and perfectly slim bodies.

The reality, though, is that most of these images are distorted. They are distorted because the regular person never looks like that and their homes don't look like that.

So it is no wonder that when we look in the mirror, sometimes we may see a distorted image of ourselves. These distorted images can be external, internal, or both.

If you're anything like me, it's these distorted images that cause us to fall into the trap of thinking we're not enough. It's far too easy to fall into the trap of "shoulding" on ourselves, for example thinking things like: *I should volunteer more, I should focus more on fitness or spiritual growth. I shouldn't have said that. I should have done such and such.* (

What I want you to hear this morning is counter-cultural.

You are enough.

You are enough because you a created child of God.

God created who you are, as you are and loves you and accepts you for who you are, just as you are.

Right now, no changes necessary.

Now there is nothing wrong with self-improvement. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be more fit, to want to deepen our spiritual lives, to want to be better people, to help those in need.

But it's equally important, maybe even more important, to know and to believe that who we are is already enough.

That's why I think it is important for us to tell others what we see in them, to name their gifts and communicate to them the positive ways they impact our lives and the lives of others.

And I think that is one of the roles of the church family, to share with each other what we see in each other and the positive contributions we make to the life of this church and the positive impact we have in the lives of others.

I don't think it's unusual for us to have distorted images of ourselves, whether these be of our external features, or our internal qualities. But put us in front of the Christ mirror with other people who know we're loved unconditionally by God and are trying to live out that love, then, you've got something to see, something that will change the world--when we look in the Christ mirror together and see ourselves as God sees us. And I do believe with all my heart that mirroring and reflecting Christ's love together, works.

It's important to share with others what it is we see in them, how we see them reflect God's love, being Christ's hands and feet in the world. And I invite you to consider how you can do that this week with the people in your family, at work, at school, at church.

But if you don't think you can do that, know that is okay because you are already enough.

Each day we are invited to look into the Christ mirror and see ourselves as God sees us, as children of God, loved, accepted, and forgiven. At the same time, we are invited to hold up this same Christ mirror to those around us so that we may see others as God sees them, and so others may also see themselves as God sees them, loved, accepted and forgiven. Actions do speak louder than words. The act of holding up the Christ mirror speaks volumes. Amen.

Written by Pastor Lynn Robertson