

What does God Look Like?

Stanton Reformed Church

October 27, 2019

Focus: God looked for a new king based on the inside not the outside; Jesus encouraged his followers that having a pure heart enables one to see God.

Function: A pure heart is one that, because of its lack of violence, is in its natural state of compassion.

Do/Think: Rid ourselves of violence; find natural compassion for all.

It's Reformation Weekend. Once a year we celebrate our heritage of being reformed and we remind ourselves that to be reformed is to always be reforming, according to the word of God.

We are not finished yet. God is always growing us. God is seeking the best for us and with us and in us.

For the last 5 weeks, we've been using a series of sayings of Jesus to grow in our understanding of how God sees the world.

Jesus asserts that blessing, happiness and contentment can be present even when there is pain, hurt or disappointment.

Jesus said that even when human life meets desparity, when we are poor in spirit, contenment can be found if we focus on the kingdom of God rather than the kingdom of this earth.

Jesus said that when we are grieving, if we look around, we will almost always find a village of comfort. Amidst sadness there is happiness in relationships.

Jesus said that this world seek to harden us but if we remain meek, gentle, trusting, we will find our home here with God right by our side.

In these sayings, Jesus is calling us to look at our world in a different way. He's not denying the reality of hurt and want in our world.

In fact, it is as if he's pulling back the hurt and want in our world as if trying to reveal a backdrop that has been covered over.

You see, if we can peel off the anger and resentment that we are carrying around.

And if we dare let go and forgive.

And if we take away the injustices of the world that have distorted the way God intended for the world to be.

You see, Jesus says - look at the painting now, look at this backdrop without all of that... this is how earth can be like it is on heaven.

When we peel away pain and hurt and disappointment and injustice, we see what God sees all along, what is underneath - it is blessing and happiness and contentment.

And now this week, saying #6, imagine Jesus pointing to this backdrop, showing us that beneath it all, underneath all the happenings of our life here, that's what God sees.

And when we are pure in heart, that is when we can see God.

Wow... see God?

And what does God look like? I mean how will we know if we see God?

I believe Samuel's thinking was fueled by these same questions.

Samuel was the prophet on duty when Israel wanted to be like everyone else. Samuel was the transition prophet of sorts.

You see when Samuel entered the scene, the people were organized and ordered by a series of judges.

But over time, the world changed around them. Other nations had kings to organize and order them. The people of God wanted to be like everyone else.

So they asked God for a king. At first God tried to tell them - don't do it. It's not a great idea.

But finally God gave in and sent Samuel to anoint and ordain a man named Saul to be the king.

And as human nature goes, Saul turned out to make decisions that were not always in the best interest of the people he served.

Israel began to waver in their worship and work - their priorities and values began to drift away from God's intention for them.

And we picked up the story when God had had enough of Saul and his poor judgment, sinful behavior.

Samuel was to go find a new king.

It's not the most safe endeavor to go behind the king's back to search for his replacement.

(As you can see politics and power, domination and betrayal has been around long before us.)

God concocted a plan to keep Samuel safe - take a heifer into this town and prepare a worship service essentially.

Invite a man named Jesse and his family to the worship service.

And so it was that while they worshiped - which I don't think I've ever said this before but a worship service was like a celebratory bbq in these times.

Even after there was a temple, worship was the only place anyone would get meat to eat. They brought the meat to the priests who

were the only ones allowed to handle food like this.

Worship was a big bbq, a party around a spit, a celebration that they were part of God's family together.

So there they are at the celebratory bbq and Samuel is sizing up all of Jesse's sons.

But as we read, God's choice wasn't obvious to Samuel.

God's choice wasn't the oldest, or the strongest, or the most saavy. God's choose was not what Samuel thought to look for.

No, God's choice ended up being the youngest son of Jesse. A young man named David. The one who was so insignificant he wasn't invited to the bbq.

The story is only several paragraphs long but it has this one phrase that I believe challenges us and our worldview to the core.

God does not look at outside appearances; God looks at the heart.

God looks inside a person.

God looks beyond what is on the outside... kind of like how Jesus has been trying to pull away the outer layer of gunk that is left from life here on earth.

Pull off the outer layer and then we see what is inside. God is interested in what is on the inside.

If God is interested in the inside, then how do we also look for or find the inside?

Well, there are a couple verses later in Matthew's gospel where Jesus gives us a couple hints.

Jesus said in Matthew chapter 12, if a tree bears good fruit then it is a good tree. If it bears bad fruit, it is a bad tree. Simply put - out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

So - the produce of our lives, including that which comes out of our mouths reveal to us what's inside.

Again, in Matthew chapter 15, Jesus reiterates by challenging us - he says, we spend all this time cleaning up the outside of our lives all the while letting our hearts pour out evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

Out of the heart, the mouth speaks.

God is interested in our insides. God is looking for purity of heart.

But there is so much in our world that is impure. There is so much slander and ugliness. There is so much blame and so many playing for power.

In fact I'd say we live on a diet of blame and judgment and domination. That's what gets the best ratings and that's what gets the most clicks.

And like it or not, we feed ourselves with impurity. How can we ever purify our hearts in such a way that we might be able to see what God sees or dare to see God?

Is it possible for us to be pure in heart?

It was at this point in my studying this week where I stumbled on the concept of nonviolent communication. Ever heard of it?

It's a perspective on life that seeks to connect us first to ourselves and then to one another.

Nonviolent communication starts where Jesus started - it starts with the words that come out of our mouths.

Out of the heart, the mouth speaks.

And so this way of looking at life dares to challenge or question talk that carries blame or judgment. Aimed at ourselves or others.

Nonviolent communication believes that if we can peel violence (which comes out as blame and judgment and our need to hold power over one another, to be right) then underneath all of that is a natural state of compassion.

Let me say that again - if we can rid ourselves of violence (physical, emotional, verbal violence), we will find that underneath it all, we have a natural compassion for ourselves and others.

Simply put - where there is an absence of violence, there is compassion.

When we stop judging those who are different, there is compassion.

When we stop blaming someone who has been hurtful, there is compassion.

When we stop trying to be right over and against those we disagree with, there is compassion.

Our choice at Stanton Reformed to join the Room for All movement of the Reformed Church in America is our way of starting with compassion.

We have made a choice as a congregation that we will remove elements of violence toward a particular group of people in our culture who have withstood a lot of violence.

We have made that choice that we are a safe place, we are allies to those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer.

Here in this place, we will steer away from blame and judgment and asserting power over and against.

We are looking to find our purity of heart. We are looking to clear away all that is violence so that we can see underneath it all is compassion.

Compassion is within us all, underneath it all.

If we can get beyond the ideas of what is right or wrong, get beyond the violence that piles on us, nonviolent communication says we can meet each other from a place of compassion.

There is a famous quote by Rumi that says, out beyond the ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing, there is a field. I will meet you there.

The pure in heart are at that field.

The pure in heart look for that field.

The field where we start with compassion.

The pure in heart know that if we start with compassion, we have the possibility for healing and reconciliation.

The pure in heart know that if we start with compassion, we can maintain empathy for others.

The pure in heart look for that field - they look for it at home and at work.

The pure in heart look for that field because they know that it is in that field where we meet one another inside to inside...

Heart to heart.

Without violence - beyond blame, without seeking power over and against - meeting one another heart to heart.

The pure in heart - they shall see God.