

“As God Sees You”

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Texts: Psalm 63: 2-8 and Luke 15: 2-10

Yesterday, when I got home from the parade, I came across a meme by a good friend from Wisconsin. It read, “God’s not as hard on me as I am.” I think she could add to it, “God’s not as hard on me as other people are.” Or even, “God loves me much more than I think I’m loved.” I could do this all day.

Many years ago, I had the privilege of working with Rev. Bryan Sirchio, a long-time, well-known UCC pastor and musician. Many of Bryan’s songs are powerful and I recommend his work to you. He was also an incredible youth ministry leader in the 1990s when I knew him. Today, he is a pastor in the Wisconsin Conference, UCC.

My favorite of Bryan’s songs is “As God Sees You”. I had hoped to play the whole song for you this morning, but was unable to get copyright clearance in time for today. I may have shared it with you before, and I probably will again, but I think it’s because people forget these basic truths. The chorus for that song goes like this:

When God sees you, God doesn't see the person you see in the mirror

God sees much clearer

God sees the meaning in your life

And all the beauty deep inside

And Jesus died to make a way for you

To see yourself as God sees you

What do you see when you look in the mirror? Do you see beauty, hope, promise, strength, courage, faith, Spirit, and joy? Or do you see what is wrong with you? Most people I know spend time, whether looking in the mirror or not, thinking about what is wrong with them. In fact, much of Christian theology today is based upon your believing that you are somehow flawed in God's eyes, and in fact, so bad, that you are beyond redemption – save for the saving action of Jesus through a particular church.

That theology is undergirded by a cosmetic, clothing, marketing, and social media industries that bombarded you with messages about what is wrong with you or missing in your life, or just plain bad about you. Sadly, even some faith communities tell you how bad you are – even and sometimes especially to God. So many people are going to hell (if you listen to their message), except for a chosen few perfect individuals. Just to be sure you know; you are not among

them. Attend X church and you can be! And that is for people who are in the mainstream. The so-called “normals” among us – whoever they are!

If you are different in your looks, your politics, your finances, your belief systems, your...almost anything. You are on the margins of society. It can be about your skin color, your hair color, your sexual orientation, your sex, where you live, you who are friends with, who are related to, and on and on and on.

This is the last Sunday for me to share with you our theme about play. I know that for some of you, this has not been your favorite theme. And yet, I have watched you share your unique qualities in music, art, creativity, and so many other ways. You have come forward with so many ideas than before. You've volunteered to share yourself with this body of people. This on top of your creativity shown when we did the special Maundy Thursday service this spring! Together, they have shown me that there is so much more to you than first meets the eye, or at first meeting, or that you'll tell me without some prompting. You are deeply gifted. You are beautiful – inside and out. You are gifted – far more than you imagine. And you can play with each other as well as be serious and do the “important” stuff.

Father Richard Rohr, in his *Daily Meditations* on July 7 was writing about a different subject, but in the *Meditation* wrote: "...I am only one part of the reflection of the great mystery of God. We are each of us simply one fingerprint or footprint of God." Does that surprise you? Are you a reflection of the living God? How'd you become that? Did you earn it? Is it 'cause you're pretty?

Our scripture today from Luke's Gospel is the same tried and true judgment of the religious authorities for the inexcusable actions of Jesus. "He welcomes sinners and eats with them!" How blasphemous! We still make the same judgment today of those who welcome and eat with those we have determined unworthy. Pity the fool who hangs out with marginalized and the poor. Parts of the church acts like kids in a school yard who taunt and tease those who are not in the popular crowd, or those who associate with them.

How narrow our vision!

Meanwhile, we sit at home, look in the mirror and think ourselves unworthy of God, humanity, or both. I asked you before where we got that from. Our answers may vary, but if one of your answers is that you got it from God, I would not believe you! Bryan Sirchio reminds us that "God sees much clearer [than humanity]". God sees the meaning in your life and all the beauty deep

inside. When God looks at you, God sees a little bit of the Divine. Each of us and all of us created in God's image and pronounced very good at the time of our creation. And that never changed. Even in the most judgmental and harsh scriptures of our Bible, there is always redemption and hope for humanity found in a God who simply cannot and will not let go of us.

All of who we are is created by God. The question is not our Divine origin or our place in God's heart. The question is what gets in the way of going deep with God? What makes us believe that we are less than someone else? What makes us hide our gifts? What makes us feel loved less? Cherished less? Maybe a better way to say those questions is to begin with "who". Who makes us feel this way? I can tell you plainly that it's not God. What if we owned and celebrated who we are as creatures of Divine creativity? How would our lives change? How would the way we live change?

We spend so much energy finding fault with ourselves and others. We jump to conclusions about peoples' motivations. And sometimes we're right. Most of the time, however, we are not.

I think our world would change a lot if people not only began to see themselves and unique and beloved children of God, but also if they began to see

that others are, too. God doesn't play favorites, and God doesn't only love some people. God loves you, and God loves me. God sees us deep inside, and grieves that we keep so much of who we are under wraps – fearing that someone might not like it. All this is to say is that I believe God hurts most when we refuse to be the beautiful creation God made us to be. Yes, we have social norms, and we have ways of being in community, but we do not have the last word on who God loves. Believe it or not, God does. And if you look at our scripture and take it seriously, I think God loves a whole lot of people that people of faith have rejected. Every day and every time, Jesus would leave the 99 to save the one.

And if that's true, then why does so much of his church care only for the 99 who are here?

“God sees the meaning in your life and all the beauty deep inside...see yourself as God sees you.” And while you're at it, look at others that way, too. You may surprise yourself.

In the many loving, blessed names of God. Amen.