

## Eyes of the Heart

Eph.1:15-23

Matt 25:31-46

The great parable of the last judgment, of the sheep and goats, has always blessed and challenged the imagination of Christians. The first part of the challenge comes as we think about who is meant by 'the nations.' Perhaps it is indeed all the nations of the world—but some commentators think it means especially the Gentile nations, those nations other than Israel. If that is the case, then the text tells us that non Jews or as we think about it non Christians have claim on God's love and rejoicing in them based on how they treat others, especially on how they treat those most vulnerable. So we hear this as God's rejoicing in the love and compassion shown even by those outside of the covenant community

Persistently in the church this text has been used to call us to care, to give, to reach out to others. I serve on the advisory board for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Also on the board is a pastor from Ojai, California. With the churches he has served in California he has gone to Tijuana, Mexico for 15 years on work trips dedicated to building houses. His 11 year old son accompanied him for the first time last year. His son, knowing of all those efforts over the years and looking around Tijuana for the first time said to him, 'Dad, is this place ever going to get fixed up?'

Don't we ask that question as we look around Bound Brook and Middlesex and Hillsborough and Somerset and Bridgewater? Then beyond that to Trenton and Newark and finally, o say to Mumbai and Jakarta and Guayaquil. Aren't we O God ever going to be able to have your spirit empower and transform people so that your Kingdom will come, your will be done. O God, why can't we seem to move more into a world where we don't kill or torture or maim or molest or hurt or ignore? O God, why can't we learn to respect each other, studying war no more and living each under his or her own tree? O God, is this place ever going to get fixed up.

Now, certainly, this text and a host of others propel us into mission trips and service organizations, and supporting refugees and housing homeless folks and offering sanctuary to all amidst the storms of life. It calls us into all those great battles for love and justice. But the text does far more than simply call us to do good works, to care for our neighbors, to be engaged citizens. The text calls us to see the mystery of Christ present in others especially when they are most vulnerable. You remember the movie Dead Man Walking with Sean Penn as a brutal killer condemned to death. In real life, a nun named Jean Prejean befriended him, somehow seeing the presence of Christ in his condemned but repentant soul. Her soul's compassion is testimony to her spirit vitality.

The scripture includes this powerful idea of seeing. When did we see thee—ask the righteous. When did we really see thee?

The text truly calls us to see one another with new eyes. Paul tells us to see with the eyes of of the heart. We are called to see others and to see ourselves with a perspective that transforms our relations to one another. When we truly see in this spiritual sense, the presence of Christ is revealed to us in our relationships of

compassion. This text doesn't just say go do good things—it says first see the world, others, yourself with new eyes. It says really that attitude is more important than action.

Over the years, I dealt with many people who came in off the streets looking for assistance. I would say that most of those relations we not holy experience for me or for the person off the streets. Frankly, it is one of the more annoying aspects of ministry. A lot of people are hustlers. And I usually don't have the time or energy to track down their story to make an informed decision on what assistance might be appropriate.

Once though, a woman who was in fact in financial difficulty, herself jobless with a handicapped husband, came and said she'd like to talk with me. After a while, she said she would especially like to have me pray for her. We prayed, she thanked me and left. A good and holy encounter. We I saw her on the streets, I would rejoice in her and lift her up.

Seeing others and ourselves with the eyes of the heart is more important than doing or giving or fixing. For one thing, our doing and giving and sharing makes us feel good about ourselves, powerful and caring. Our doing without rooting ourselves in the spirit of Christ can readily lead us to an attitude of paternalism, of superiority. OGHS and other offerings have frequently included the phrase 'Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.'

I was in Barahona, Dominican Republic with a group of mostly clergy visiting churches. Unable to sleep well, I was outside shortly after dawn, one morning, looking out over the bay. It was raining slightly. I began watching and then finally really saw two fishermen. They were in a long canoe. One man stood, balancing himself and threw out a huge net that looked like it extended maybe 30 feet. I was amazed at his balance, skill, and dexterity. I was not about to teach him to fish. If I stood up in a canoe like that we would all be swimming with the fish, not catching them. He might have needed a loan to buy or repair his nets or to get his product to market. But he didn't need to be taught to fish.

How do we see one another in this sanctuary, in our communities and in the world with new eyes, with the eyes of the heart? How do we come to a place like those Emmaus Road disciples where our eyes are opened and we recognize him?

There is no easy or automatic answer. This opening of the eyes of the heart happens for every one of us. Sometimes, it happens on a beautiful day—sometimes, through a gloomy, rainy NJ night. Maybe at the Grand Canyon or looking out over New York from the empire state building. Maybe, our eyes are opened by a rose blooming in our backyard. The smile flowing from an old, wrinkled face and the smile of a newborn—they all can open our hearts.

When our eyes are opened, when we see others with the eyes of our heart, when we are blessed by Christ with the opportunity and responsibility of serving Him by serving others, then indeed we are prepared ourselves for his glorious and challenging greeting in our hearts. Come o blessed and inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.