

Epiphany 4A  
Peace, Seattle  
January 29, 2016  
1 Cor 1:18-31, Matt 5:1-12

## **TO SEE AS HE SEES**

**In his story THE SHELL COLLECTOR, author Anthony Doerr tells of a boy whose sight by age 12 has left him.**<sup>1</sup> Traveling with his father from their home in northwest Canada to an eye specialist in southern Florida, the boy learns that there will be no cure for his blindness.

But the doctor, intent on giving him something, takes him through the back door of his office and onto a spit of beach, removes the boy's shoes and socks, and invites him to wade barefoot in the shallows.

When his toes come upon a small round shell, the boy reaches down with his fingers to dig it up. Feeling that "sleek egg of its body" in his hand, he knows it is the most elegant thing he has ever held.

And when the doctor names the shell, describes its brown spots, its toothed rim and dark stripes, the boy discovers that his fingers have become his eyes, that he can see it, and this discovery sets him on the path toward a new destiny.

Within a few years, he has learned Braille, read every book on shells he can get his hands on, and at age 16 leaves home for good to crew on sailboats through the tropics.

"His fingers, his senses, his mind—all of him," writes Doerr, "obsessed over the geometry of exoskeletons, the sculpture of calcium, the evolutionary rationale for ramps, spines, bends, whorls, folds. He learned to identify a shell by flipping it up in his hand; the shell spun, his finger assessed its form, classified it."<sup>2</sup>

Returning eventually to Florida, he earns a BA in biology, a PhD in the study of mollusks, and becomes a preeminent malacologist. **All because he learned to see in a different way.**

**Today we have the first in a series of four gospel readings from Jesus' sermon on the mount. And what I want to suggest is that this sermon of Jesus is first and foremost about A NEW WAY OF SEEING.**

**In this sermon Jesus shows us the lens through which God views us and the world, and through which we in turn come to see God—and one another.**

God sees everything that's going on—the unfolding histories, the interplay of relationships, the clash of cultures, the lives of the haves and the have-not's—God sees it all, views it all through the eyes of the incarnate one, Jesus.

And seeing this rag tag bunch of humanity up close and personal, God declares through Jesus:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers..."

Logical? No. Enigmatic? Yes.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Doerr, *The Shell Collector*. (New York: Scribner, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page 13

## **Jesus looks at the dregs, the failures, the broken and splintered flotsam and jetsam gathered 'round him and calls them BLESSED!**

His way of seeing, this lens of his, is so contrary to common sense, so completely upside down that in order for us to view the world as he does, we may very well have to become blind first!

For how else will we be able to block out the pecking orders and hierarchies and power structures that dominate our culture's way of being and seeing? How else will we come to see what he's trying to show us—to tell us?

**There's a battle going on in our country right now. Every day, it seems, a new line is drawn.**

**This battle has everything to do with how we see; and what we see when we look at each other.**

**Should our recognition of one other depend on...**

- the color of our skin?
- the accent in our speech?
- our country of origin?
- what we wear on their heads?
- whom we love?

**Should these be the markers that determine friend from foe?**

**This morning Jesus turns the world's old, worn categories on their heads.**

- It's not wealth that's a sign of blessing, he says, but poverty!
- It's not bullying that wins the day but acts of mercy.
- God, it turns out, isn't so impressed with the impressive;
- God does not feel privileged to be among the privileged.<sup>3</sup>

God is instead befriender of the destitute and forsaken; God stands with the outcast and persecuted—and not only stands with them but BLESSES THEM!

**Sisters and brothers, what are we going to do with this information?**

**How are we going to act on what Jesus is telling us, showing us?**

Eugene Peterson, in his translation, renders verses 11-12 like this:

Count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me... You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble."<sup>4</sup>

Looking at the world through the lens Jesus provides is going to lead to trouble; it's going to lead to some holy havoc!

Why? Because seeing through his eyes puts us at odd with the world's priorities and its methods. Paul says faith's way of "seeing," from the world's perspective, is utter foolishness; yet, he says, for those who are being brought to safety and being made whole it is none other than the power and wisdom of God.

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<sup>3</sup> Christian Century, T. Denise Anderson. p. 21, 1/4/2017

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Peterson. *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary Language*. (Colorado: The Nav Press, 1993) page 18.

**As we look across the many faultlines that define our country right now, it's hard to see folks on the other side—whatever that “other side” may be for us—who look like children of God.**

Wednesday past: ecumenical calendar marked the Conversion of Paul.

- One of the most remarkable parts of that story, for me, is the role that Ananias plays.
- After Saul has a vision of the risen Christ, and is struck blind, it is Ananias, a faithful disciple and as a Christian part of the persecuted minority, whom Christ calls upon to find Saul, lay hands on him, and restore his sight.
- LORD, says Ananias, I KNOW THIS MAN'S REPUTATION! HOW MUCH EVIL HE'S CAUSED, HOW MUCH BLOOD IS ON HIS HANDS... But Christ says, GO ANANIAS. I HAVE CHOSEN HIM TO BE MY INSTRUMENT FOR BRINGING MY NAME TO THE NATIONS.
- So Ananias goes; he finds where Saul is staying; lays his hands on him, and calls him BROTHER!
- He restores Saul's sight, paving the way for a ministry that will turn the world upside down.

**The God we meet in Jesus teaches us that when we see as he sees the scales fall away, our sight clears, and we see sisters, we behold brothers! When we see as he sees, we stand up with him to do as he has done.**

When we gather downstairs for our meal and meeting in a few minutes, we'll review reports and discuss budgets. We'll look at resolutions and do our best to talk about where we've been and where we're going. And what we'll really be about in all this is building our life together around Jesus' vision; Seeing as he sees.

And, through the power of the Holy Spirit, committing ourselves once again to living that vision out, specifically, intentionally, purposefully, gracefully as public church.

May God, grant us such sight! And the will and wherewithal to follow.

AMEN.