

Welcome

When I was in seventh grade, we read a dramatization of *Beauty and the Beast* in class. Another kid, Ricky, and I both wanted to read for the Beast, so our teacher settled it the most logical way. Since the Beast's signature line was his horrifying roar, Ricky and I would have a roar-off. We'd both give our most Beast-ly roar and the winner would read for the Beast.

Ricky went first, and I'll be honest: it was a pretty great roar. But I was confident. I threw back my head, closed my eyes and let out a roar that shook the school. Men fled before my might. Women wept. Children soiled themselves.

At least, that's how it sounded in my mind. When I opened my eyes, the flush of pride already warming my cheeks, I saw my teacher's face and knew something was wrong. She looked like she had just seen a giant cockroach or something. All she could find to say was, "Uh... was that it?"

The class around me burst into laughter and I realized that, somehow, my fearsome, terrifying roar was not at all what they heard. The reality I experienced in my head was not at all the reality they experienced.

Have you ever been there? A place where your experience of some event, your perspective on an issue, absolutely does not jive with someone else? Maybe it's a movie you stubbornly insist is the greatest of all time while it's sitting at 13% on RottenTomatoes. Or some food like broccoli that you know is the worst edible thing God ever invented but everyone keeps insisting if you put cheese on it, it's great.

But it happens with real stuff too. How many times have you been 100% right on an issue, and you've laid out your perspective and arguments carefully and thoughtfully and someone on the other side still completely disagrees with you?

How often have you been in a fight with a friend, spouse or partner where you're pretty sure you're arguing about the same thing because you were both there when the fight started, but they're so far from your position you're starting to question yourself.

To be human is to have a limited perspective. That's what makes relationships hard. I may be right some of the time. But no one is right *all the time*.

As we begin worship today, consider this problem of perspective. Consider times you've seen the world wrongly. Think about how you came to see you were wrong. And begin to wonder with me, how might we learn to see from God's point of view?

Message

[My perspective is not God's perspective] We're in the season of Lent, which is the time in the Church year we set aside for self-examination. We look inward to discover the sin in our lives,

so that we can confess that sin and cry out for God's help. Today, we're talking about perspective. The sin we'll face today is a sin of pride, a sin of assuming that my perspective is the right perspective. Particularly in the Church, we tend to assume that the way I see the world is the way God sees the world, that my eyes are God's eyes.

Our series this year is called Lent is for Losers because coming face to face with our sin makes us confront the reality that we are lost, hopeless apart from God. When we see how different our perspective is from God's, it can be crushing, disheartening.

We'll see today that we're not alone, however. Even prophets and kings don't always see from God's perspective. And while we all fail to see as God sees, God shares with us freely. If we will be open to God, if we can learn not to rush to judgment, God will give us eyes to see.

[Map so far] We began this series in the Garden of Eden, with the first sin, where we saw that we tend to believe God is holding out on us, not that God wants the best for us. Then we met Abram, whom God called into the unknown. We reflected on how faith paves the way to a legacy of life. Last week, we were with Israel after God freed them from slavery in Egypt. We contemplated our failure to trust God to provide in difficult times.

[Scripture Slide] Turn with me in your bibles to 1 Samuel 16. Today, we'll be in the Promised Land. Israel has been settled in the land for several generations, and they've made the transition from a loose tribal confederation to a monarchy. A prophet named Samuel had ruled over them until God chose Saul to be the king of Israel. Samuel anointed Saul king, and then acted as a sort of advisor and father figure to him.

But, like Israel in the wilderness, Saul could not trust God. Plagued by anxiety, Saul repeatedly disobeyed God until God finally took his blessing away from Saul. Samuel was devastated, but God encouraged him, told him God already had a new king in mind. God sent Samuel to Bethlehem, a little village in the southern part of the Promised Land, to meet a man named Jesse.

Since Samuel didn't want Saul to learn about the newly anointed king, he does a bunch of fun cloak-and-dagger stuff (you can read it in the opening verses of 1 Samuel 16). But he eventually meets with Jesse's family because God has told him one of Jesse's sons will be the next king of Israel.

Let's read what happens next, and pay particular attention to how Samuel sees, and what God sees:

When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, "Surely this is the Lord's anointed!"

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Then Jesse told his son Abinadab to step forward and walk in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "This is not the one the Lord has chosen." Next Jesse summoned Shimea, but Samuel said, "Neither is this the one the Lord has chosen." In the same way all seven of Jesse's sons were presented to Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Then Samuel asked, "Are these all the sons you have?"

"There is still the youngest," Jesse replied. "But he's out in the fields watching the sheep and goats."

"Send for him at once," Samuel said. "We will not sit down to eat until he arrives."

So Jesse sent for him. He was dark and handsome, with beautiful eyes. And the Lord said, "This is the one; anoint him."

So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah. -- 1 Samuel 16:6-13

Jesse's oldest son, Eliab, presents himself and Samuel thinks, "This is the guy! Look at him!" Apparently, it's because he's a sharp, good-looking fellow. He looks like a leader, a guy people would vote for if you voted for a king.

But God challenges Samuel: you've got the wrong perspective. You're looking for the wrong things. I'm not interested in externals. I look at the heart. (Heart in the ancient world wasn't just emotions. It was sort of how we think of our soul - the essence of our thoughts, feelings, drives, the heart is what makes us, us.)

It's a little bit surprising that Samuel got this so wrong. After all, he's God's chosen prophet, the spiritual head of Israel. And he's been at this a long time. Surely he knows what God wants? Surely he knows how God thinks?

Here's the thing: do you know why Saul was chosen to be king? Back in chapter 10, we read that,

They found Saul and brought him out, and he stood head and shoulders above anyone else. Then Samuel said to all the people, "This is the man the Lord has chosen as your king. No one in all Israel is like him!"

And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!" -- 1 Samuel 10:23-24

Saul was a tall, good-looking guy. The kind of guy people would follow into battle. The kind of guy people naturally wanted to trust.

The last time God chose a king, God *did* choose someone with all the externals. So in this moment, with Eliab, Samuel is actually going with what he knows, going with what God has done before.

This is important: Samuel assumed he had the right perspective based on how God had done things before.

But guess what? God was doing something different now. Why?

We don't actually know. Go to the library and check out 10 commentaries on 1 Samuel and they'll give you 10 different theories as to why God does something different here. Because God doesn't give Samuel an explanation. And the author of 1 Samuel doesn't have any idea either. He doesn't try to explain it.

[Ignoring God] As it stands, then, this story can be a warning for us: We have a tendency to leave God out of our lives. Even people in the Church tend to go about our day-to-day lives and assume we know what God wants from us based on what God has already done. We assume we know God's perspective because of how we engaged an issue previously. We have no room in our lives, in our politics, in our relationships for a living and active God who can do and think whatever God wants because he is God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, the God who is not constrained by the past or our boxes or our ideas.

Friends, if even prophets and kings fail to see God's perspective, how much more do we need to be cautious in our next conflict? How much more humility do we need to inject into our political views? How much more do we need to stop and wait, and pray that God will give us God's perspective?

When I was in college, I worked for our University's groundscrew one summer. Any of you who do or have done professional lawncare know it can be a demanding job. I didn't mind so much because I made several friends quickly and despite the early, long hours, we had fun and worked hard.

Our boss noticed our hard work. He also noticed that the other crew on our shift didn't work hard. While we were mowing fields and edging dormitory sidewalks, the other crew parked their work truck outside a classroom building and spent hours sitting in the air conditioned lobbies.

Rather than address their lack of work, our boss just gave us all the important jobs. Fields that hadn't been mowed since the start of the season. Dorms getting new furniture that had to be unloaded. The harder we worked, the more the other crew slacked.

We were furious. I spent several weeks in a self-righteous stew of anger. I directed it at my boss, furious that rather than reward our hard work and punish the slackers, they were allowed to laze about.

At some point in those weeks, I felt guilt about my attitude toward my boss. The rage in my heart grew and grew, and I knew it had turned into something toxic. So I prayed. I asked God to help me understand my boss. I asked for a new perspective, God's perspective.

Over the next week or so, I began to see and hear things about my boss. Random snippets of conversation. Passing moments. They gave me an insight into his life, his pain, his struggles I didn't have before. I quickly gained a new empathy for him, saw why he might respond to the other crew the way he did.

I still didn't *agree* with his behavior. Not by a long shot. But with my new perspective, I actually wanted to be part of the solution. I wanted to work harder for him, to ensure I wasn't one more point of pain in his week. That sort of transformation was unimaginable to me before I had that new perspective. But because I paused, because I asked God for new sight, a better perspective, God changed something in me.

Friends, where might you need new perspective? Is there a fight you keep having over and over? Is there an issue you're deeply committed to, so much so that when you look at your opponents you can't imagine how they could disagree, let alone hold *that* perspective?

Our culture is plagued with certainty right now. We're all a bunch of Samuels, rushing ahead of God, confident we got this. We already know the right answer. We already have the right vision. We have become prideful in our perspective and that pride has blinded us to what God is doing.

Today we must pause. Like Samuel, we must let God correct our vision, open our eyes that we might see clearly, see the way God sees. God is not selfish with his perspective. God wants to give us eyes to see.

But before we can be healed, we must admit we are blind.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] We come to this table today as Jesus' disciples came the night before Jesus was killed. Like us, they were blind to what God was doing. They couldn't see that Jesus was walking purposefully toward the cross, for them and for us.

Even still, he broke bread and offered it to them as his body, broken for them. He offered a cup of wine as his blood, poured out as a new covenant between us and God.

In their blindness, they all betrayed Jesus. In our blindness, we too are unfaithful. But the Cross healed them of their blindness. The Cross revealed Jesus as God, crucified for humanity.

So we approach today as a people in need of new eyes. We ask God to heal us and we wait at the table for God to speak. We leave looking for where the Spirit moves, anxious to follow her lead back into the world.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion. If you are willing to ask God for new perspective, and if you're willing to wait on God to give you new sight, you're welcome to come forward.

Examen

1. When in the last week have I paused to seek God's perspective?
2. When in the last week have I allowed pride to blind me to God's way?
3. When in the next week might pride blind me to God's way?
4. How can I pause this week and wait for God to give me a holy perspective?

Confession:

Leader: We have allowed our pride to blind us to your perfect way.

People: Lord, open our eyes.

Leader: We have ignored your voice, calling us to the responsibility of living in your freedom.

People: Lord, open our ears.

Leader: We have stained our souls by our action and inaction.

People: Cleanse us, Lord.

Leader: We are broken by disease, bruised by the sins of others, weakened and unable to repair ourselves.

People: Heal us, Lord.

Leader: We ignore your call to center our lives in you, and so are deaf to the hopes and cries of the poor, the sick, the needy, and the earth.

People: Ground us, Lord!

Leader: When we confess our sinful ways, God abundantly pardons. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

People: In the name of Jesus Christ, we are all forgiven

Prayer

Blessing

The Gospel reading for this Sunday is John 9, the story of a man born blind who Jesus heals. I want to challenge you to read this story several times this week. As you do, you'll note a group of religious leaders who is convinced they already see clearly. But ironically, their pride has blinded them. This blind man sees more clearly than they do because he let Jesus heal him.

As you read this beautiful story, may you find the Spirit opening your eyes and giving you new perspectives. May you see your boss and your coworkers in a new light. May you see your family, your friends, your spouse or partner or significant other with new eyes. May you see the path God is calling you to walk and may the Spirit give you the strength to walk that path. Because Life waits for you.

