

Welcome

Good morning! I'm Pastor Sonya. I'm one of the pastors on the preaching team here at Catalyst and I'll be preaching today.

I love art. I love to visit museums to look at art. I've been taking my son with me to different museums for the past year. He's not enthusiastic about it. Recently we visited the National Gallery of Art to look at their modern and contemporary collections. My son was very vocal and expressed how abstract art makes him upset because it looks like scribbles, there is a canvas with just one color, there's no depth, and his 5 year old niece could probably do better. I explained, "well... it's not that it has no dimension, it's just that you don't understand it and it invokes a feeling from you." I received the teenager's eye roll and he explained how art should be pleasant to look at.

That's the thing about art - art can be interpreted differently. What one sees as scribbles is also seen by another to be something else.

My frustration with art is how classic works of art are most often European, Anglo artwork. Art from the same time period and from a non-Anglo, European community are often categorized as folk art. What I see as masterpieces is not always what the art would classically define as masterpieces - it's folk art to the art world.

In recent years this issue of how art is defined has been under scrutiny. But not much has changed because if the art powers that be changed the old managed rule of art, it could affect the value and prestige of artwork. Why would they want to give up their money, privilege, and control over art?

Who gets to decide what counts as a masterpiece? We could ask the same question of our own lives - who gets to decide what counts as a good life? A holy life? How can we know whether we're seeing the world - and each other the way God sees?

Today we'll explore how God sees the world - how God sees us. We are called to reflect who God is to the world around us. In order to do that we have to let go of the old managed image of God that diminishes God's love and grace to the oppressed, marginalized, and poor - the least of these.

I want to invite you to sing with us. Chanell is going to lead us in songs of God's people. Let's stand, if you are able to and sing together!

Message

Today is the fourth Sunday of Lent, which is a six-week journey we take with Jesus to the Cross. It's a season we set aside each year for reflection, a time to ask ourselves if we're living in faith, both as individuals and as a church family.

Our series this year is called Broken Promises. Each week, we're exploring one of the covenants God made with the people in the Hebrew Bible. We'll see how - and why - the people failed to keep those covenants. That's our passageway to our own reflection.

We're also going to see how Jesus kept each of these covenants in his own life and ministry. This is a reminder for us that we're not on this journey alone. We're always following our leader, Jesus. It's his faithfulness that enables our life of faith. It is in our faithfulness to come to the Light, Jesus, that reveals we have the safety and security to explore our own failings. Jesus' love and faithfulness create space for us to be honest about our own sin so that we can confess it and turn to him.

The question we're exploring today is how we see the world. Who decides what's heroic, what's important, what's valuable? Do those tastemakers value what God does? (Spoiler: no, they don't.) In that case, how can we learn to see the way God sees the world and how God sees us?

Turn with us to [1 Samuel 16:1-13](#)

1 Samuel just told us that God regretted making Saul king over Israel. But it was not God's choice in the first place. God's people first had something like nation tribal councils where all things in relation to the community depended on God. The people did not honor God with their hearts and asked for a king to be like the earthly kingdoms around them. Saul fits what the people wanted - Saul was a king after the people's heart - a man who would fight their military battles, handsome, strong, tall, respectable - a man of valor. The people selected Saul as king. Saul as king of Israel continually disobeyed and did not listen to God. Corruption, personal gain, entitlement, and complacency plagued the newly developed monarchy. Samuel even approached Saul about his lack of obedience to God, taking things into his own hands, and how as a leader he must be obedient to God. God decides to select a new leader.

Samuel mourns over God's rejection of Saul and was in no hurry to search for a replacement. Maybe Samuel was saul-lking (sulking). God nudges Samuel to get up and start towards this new future. He travels to Bethlehem to anoint the person from the house of Jesse God has chosen as

Saul's successor. Samuel then performs the customary preparation of purification for the sacred event of anointing of God's choice for king of Israel.

So Samuel did as the Lord instructed. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town came trembling to meet him. 'What's wrong?' they asked. 'Do you come in peace?'

'Yes,' Samuel replied. 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Purify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' Then Samuel performed the purification rite for Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice, too."

"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.'"

When Samuel saw the oldest son, Eliab, he thought this eldest son was God's choice based on the physical qualities like Saul - handsome, tall, and strong - he fits the cultural expectation of what makes for a good king or leader. What are the equivalents in our world today for good leaders, even pastors? Maybe someone who is well spoken, outgoing, strong, rugged, tough, male, the leader of his household? It would be me saying that a holy and bible believing church needs to have a pastor who is well groomed, went to a bible college, is male, married and has well behaved kids. This is what many people seek and believe what a pastor should be. I've been overlooked as a female pastor and other female pastors experience similar. When I was married, most people assumed my husband was the pastor. It was constantly "pastor and their wives" in larger gathering places. I was even told that while the men and pastors repair the church, the women can cook. I felt so upset because I can do physical labor as well and I have all the necessary tools and skills to complete the task. I was constantly told that I didn't fit their idea of a leader of a church.

What we think the person should look like, have a certain personality, be part of certain social groups, be a particular gender, and so on are stereotypes that perpetuate negative ideals of a leader, pastor, gender, and ethnicity. But God refocuses Samuel's attention not on people's physical qualities, but to look at their heart. In today's context, heart language is more sentimental and often associated with love that is based on affection, romance, and desire. Ancient Israel understood the heart to be the source of thought and reflection - the heart reveals all attributes of the person physically, mentally, and emotionally. God sees how important a humble and gentle person is. Maybe Samuel did not notice or was unable to notice how God saw people. God nurtures Samuel to look at the heart- this was intended so that these perpetuated and harmful stereotypes would not harm the leader and the people they were called to care for - look at others the way God sees.

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.

David’s qualities are different. He is the youngest of eight sons of Jesse and he is a shepherd. The life of a shepherd is simple and humble. A shepherd is not like what we think of cowboys in the American West of being rugged, independent, and macho. The epic quality David has is a humble and obedient shepherd. A shepherd cares for their sheep day and night, rain or shine. This unlikely quality of a shepherd is what God wants for a future king to tend to his people.

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 is significant in providing a religious tradition and heritage for both Jews and Christians. God sees how important a humble and gentle person is. We might quite possibly consider if we could shatter the perspective of the mortal world and see the wonders and love of God at work in the world around us. We should note that God has a history of calling shepherds to leadership - there was Abraham, Moses, and Jacob. God even reminds David about his roots in 2 Samuel 7:8b “I took you from tending sheep in the pasture and selected you to be the leader of my people Israel.” God did not care about age, physical characteristics, physical strength, the most impressive or for the most influential. God did not seek out a crusading leader or a warrior. How do we visualize a king, a ruler, or a leader? Think about what’s closer to our context today. How do we visualize an elected official? A boss? A head of household? How does our culture teach us values that run counter to God’s way?

I think we are blinded by the world of power and privilege. We end up interpreting God’s word to reinforce the idea that kingly power, strength, and prestige is what matters. God literally wipes the eye boogers from our eyes to see that hope comes from a gentle and humble shepherd.

Let's pause here and sing together of a God who calls us to see ourselves and others based on what is inside our hearts.

Song

The season of Lent is a time where Jesus followers self-examine and reflect on how to best live in faith. We internalize and live out our cultural context that is assimilated and colonized by the dominant society. God calls us to discern for ourselves what we need to change in our lives so that we can be faithful followers. God tells us in 1 Samuel how important humble and gentle qualities are. These heart qualities go hand in hand with how we see ourselves, other people, and the world.

We all have been nurtured to see in a particular way. We refuse to look at conditions around us. We don't need to notice or acknowledge others. We can look at someone and make presumptions about them or are willing to ignore them completely. We make assumptions about art and assume it's just scribbles. We don't truly understand a painting or drawing until we take the time to look deeper at the color, the variations in and intention of a hue, even how the value of relative light forms the picture. We have to consider the perspective of the space and if there is something that the artist tries to draw attention to. There is a lot more to art if we take the time to see what the artist sees. There's a lot more to people if we take the time to see them the way God sees.

God has a history of calling shepherds to leadership. Lent allows for reflection to see leadership the way God sees - God reveals to us Jesus - the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd.

Turn with us to John 9.

John tells us of a man who was blind from birth and has a healing encounter with Jesus. The blind man wasn't asking for healing. Jesus and his disciples were walking past the blind man. It's like us walking past someone on the street. The disciples ask Jesus what sin caused the blindness. Jesus answers them that it was not because of his sin or his parents' sin. The healing act about to occur is so the power of God could be seen in the blind man.

“But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.’ Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man’s eyes. He told him, “Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam” (Siloam means “sent”).

So the man went and washed and came back seeing! His neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, “Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?” Some said he was, and others said, “No, he just looks like him!”

But the beggar kept saying, “Yes, I am the same one!” They asked, “Who healed you? What happened?” He told them, “The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.’ So I went and washed, and now I can see!” “Where is he now?” they asked. “I don’t know,” he replied. ” (John 9:5-13, NLT)

Isn’t it odd that people have difficulty with acknowledging the miracle that occurred to the man who was once blind? Everyone has an idea of who they think this guy is. The disciples see him or his parents as a possible sinner. The community the blind man was part of questioned if it was really him who was healed. The religious authorities see this man’s healing as a threat to their regulations of the sabbath. NO ONE is seeing him as Jesus saw him, which was as an irruption of God’s presence in their midst! The question of “who healed you?” “what happened?” “where is he now?” shows no one could afford to admit what was plain to see - Jesus had healed this guy! Why? Because then they would have to see the truth about Jesus too- he’s from God. As we read this next passage, listen to how different people refer to Jesus specifically.

“Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This **man Jesus is not from God**, for he is working on the Sabbath.’ Others said, ‘But how could **an ordinary sinner** do such miraculous signs?’ So there was a deep division of opinion among them. Then the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and demanded, ‘What’s your opinion about this **man** who healed you?’ The man replied, ‘I think he must be **a prophet**.’... So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, ‘God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is **a sinner**.’ ‘I don’t know whether he is a sinner,’ the man replied. ‘ But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!’ ‘But what did he do?’ they asked. ‘How did he heal you?’ ‘Look!’ the man exclaimed. ‘I told you once. Didn’t you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?’ Then they cursed him and said, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses! We know God spoke to Moses, but **we don’t even know where this man comes from**.’ ‘Why, that’s very strange!’ the man replied. ‘He healed my eyes, and yet you don’t know where he comes from? We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. **If this man were not from God, he couldn’t have done it**.’ ‘You were born a total sinner!’ they answered. ‘Are you trying to teach us?’ And they threw him out of the synagogue. (John 9:16-17; 24-34, NLT)

The religious authorities willfully blind themselves to Jesus’s true identity rather than step into the light. They make a public effort - it would look today to make a news announcement, a social media post, send out an email or newsletter - to tell everyone why this person healed by Jesus should not be listened to, he is a liar, a sinner - the person is not the disciple of the one, true God.

The religious authorities do all they can to contain the claim of the man's healing by Jesus. It's the "fake news" of their day. As much as the religious authorities work to discredit and dismiss the man - they cannot deny that he can now see.

It's difficult when people attempt to discredit and dismiss you. People have tried to discredit me as a pastor because I did not return to an abusive marriage - I've been told by leaders in the church how God hates divorce and I need to restore my marriage because God wants the family to remain together. I know religious people will bring up my divorce and will tell me that I didn't pray hard enough or work hard enough to keep my marriage. People will also avoid saying anything against the religious authorities so they can remain in good standing with leadership and remain within the church. Even the parents of the man healed avoided saying anything about their son's sight being restored. This blind man becomes a witness of how he gained his sight. The healed man is not imitated by his neighbors or the Pharisees - he doesn't even respond in a defensive tone. The man sees Jesus as a prophet and the healing is from God - a sinner couldn't possibly heal a blind man.

When you step into the light, you realize there's more to being a Christ follower than wishing or hoping Jesus would come now and take us out of the difficult realities of this earthly world. I feel God opens our eyes to reassess the world and humanity through God's lens. We foolishly assume that we know the heart of God and what the kingdom of God looks like. We are blind if we believe that health, wealth, upward mobility, and power is a blessing of being faithful. We do not profit off the misfortunes of others and find reason to label the poor, marginalized, oppressed, the least of these in their current situation because they cannot pull up their bootstraps and lift themselves out - they are blind because they are sinners. God's kingdom does not work against Jesus' ministry of caring for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. How do we bear witness of the light that shines to remove darkness? Much of the world is blind due to complacency of racism, sexism, patriotism, and materialism. Do we really think that God wants a world that systematically disempowers and oppresses humanity? Why should we continually endure harmful and abusive situations just because a religious leader tells us to?

I have a difficult time with passages about David. I think because stories about him are often over romanticized to perpetuate a masculine and patriarchal model. The world view perspective of David highlights his political kingship, military heroism, as well as, his national and religious leadership - this creates this epic hero. Who decided that this is what counts as kingly? Who decided that's what makes someone powerful? There is a military trend and war theme that is profitable among filmmakers. Most people would like to hear about and listen to a war hero, a strong political leader, or even a strong male hero over an ordinary person. I'm not dismissing David's military and political accomplishments. I think we have to look at why God chose David in the first place. God calls the gentle, humble, and caring shepherd to lead. We have to open our eyes to see the true shepherd.

The blind man is the first person to see Jesus' identity. The religious leaders, the prophets claim to have a 20/20 vision of God - the curator of authentic religious experience and yet they don't see who Jesus is. The religious leaders believe they are defenders of truth and feel that they can decide who Jesus is. The Light, Jesus is present with the blind man and provides proof that he is the light of the world.

I survived an abusive marriage. God has used this trauma to help other pastors and people to know that God loves them even if other people see leaving an abusive marriage as sinful. Perspective sheds light back on times of darkness - when we were blind. The life of Jesus offers this amazing healing and hope - this bestowing of sight. Jesus gives sight to the once blind man represents our true shepherd who is the giver of light and sight to all who believe.

EXAMEN + COMMUNION

Call to the Table

Jesus, our shepherd, our giver of sight and light invites us to the table. The only requirement is that we be willing to see who Jesus is. We have to acknowledge that we are God's beloved children, that our sin separates us from God. We have to acknowledge that we live in a world of false truths. And we have to acknowledge that Jesus is the Truth, the one who came to save us.

Before we receive Communion together, we're going to reflect in prayer. I'll ask you some questions, and give you an opportunity to ask them to God. Then we'll pray together.

Examen Questions

When in the last week have I embraced Jesus' healing? When have I allowed him to open my eyes?

When in the last week have I closed my eyes to my own sin or had stubborn faith?

When in the week ahead might I be tempted to refuse Jesus' light, to refuse to acknowledge Jesus' healing works around me?

How can I reflect Jesus' humble and gentle posture in the next week?

Prayer

God, we come to you and ask to let us see your purpose clearly. As we receive these elements, may they become a spiritual food for us. Where we cannot see, grant us healing in order to envision your good purpose. May we see the world you created more clearly and to live in it more faithfully. In your name we pray. Amen.

On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it.” For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again.

Assignment + Blessing

Assignment

Your assignment this week is to read John 9 in its entirety. Think about the places in the text that brings about how Jesus’s coming reveals the people’s heart in not accepting Jesus as the giver of sight. How does 1 Samuel and John 9 relate to looking at the heart of the person and not their outward appearance or status?

Blessing

Catalyst, may you go this week with opened eyes seeing God’s vision for the world and God’s purpose already at work around you. Go in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!