

## What Do YOU See?

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 11:32-44

One of the best things about being a teacher is observing students when they learn something unexpected. As a horseback riding instructor, I've always been partial to junior highers. They're old enough to that they think they know what life is about. They think they've got a solid handle on things, and they've learned that kids are the only ones who still have stuff to learn. Junior higher are NO LONGER kids; they are far too cool to have anything new left to learn. So when you have that magical moment with a junior higher when they actually do learn something, it's incredible. Watching someone who thinks they have the world figured out, realize that there is always something more to learn, is amazing because it transforms their jaded, unimpressed, stoicism into mesmerized inspiration. It's like striking a match. It's like giving sight to the blind.

In our post-enlightenment world, we are deeply committed to trusting in what our eyes see. We use the scientific method; we observe and repeat and trust what we learn from these repeated observations. We draw conclusions based on what we learn from our lives' experiences, and we become like junior highers, disenchanted and stoic. Be honest! We have all felt this way at some point. Some folks live their whole lives like this. But sometimes, the veil draws back, we catch a glimpse of something entirely unexpected and it makes us question what we thought we knew. It opens an ability to see, to imagine, to hope in a world we cannot always see with just our eyes.

The prophet John experienced a rather extreme version of this type of thing when he had his apocalyptic vision. He saw unimaginable, inexpressible, things and he tried to put words around them. He tells us that he **saw** a new heaven and new earth and he **saw** the

holy city. Then he tells us a voice from the throne loudly beckoned him to **see** what only God could **see**, a world beyond all the pain of this life. The chapter preceding these verses tell us of death and the grave being permanently destroyed in a lake of fire and John wants us to understand the ramifications of that. God's presence, the absence of tears, crying, and pain. Then Jesus himself tells us to **see** what is being shown to John; **see** that God, the creator who started this whole thing to begin with, is also the one who will fulfil the original purpose by perfecting it, making all things new. These are truths that exist beyond our present experience, beyond John's. But John had a vision of it, and he invites us to witness it through his eyes. He's inviting us to **see** with new eyes, the truths that exist beyond the veil of this world and the limitations of our humanity.

Jesus' life was spent helping to reframe the thinking of the people with whom he lived. This encounter at Lazarus' tomb has many significant components to it. It is no accident that he healed several blind men before raising Lazarus from the dead. And he did not raise Lazarus for Lazarus' sake. Lazarus' body would eventually die...again. And as much as Jesus loved Mary, he didn't raise Lazarus for her sake either. He did it to demonstrate a greater reality than the most formidable reality they knew. God is ALMIGHTY! Death and the power of the grave, what was understood as the end of all the living, is not in fact the end. God is more powerful. The Creator is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Death does not get the last word. Life does. ReCreation, new life, is the ultimate end. Jesus healed the blind to help even the seeing people to see something more profound than the tangible realities of this life. One of those realities is that those who have passed through the grave are more vibrantly alive, more aware of the presence of God, than we who live on this side of a limited grave.

Yesterday, our new presiding bishop noted, when speaking about this story, that Jesus voice penetrated the veil of death separating the seen world from the invisible one. He

pointed out the power of the living voice of Jesus to touch the living Lazarus on the other side of the grave and restore his body to life in obedience to that call.

The “cloud of witnesses”, those who have gone before us and understand these realities in a way beyond our imagining, run this race beside us, cheering us on. They have the benefit, not only of the wisdom gained through a lifetime of experience, but also of personally knowing the stabilizing comfort that God **is** recreating this world, and all that seems to be loss in this world, is and will be gain in the next. Those who built **this** church, lived through The Civil War not merely civil unrest. They lived through repeated wars, losing entire generations of men on distant shores without the assurance of their country’s future. They experienced economic collapse, not just economic crisis. They lived through political upheaval, social revolutions, and the ongoing battle for civil rights. We face a presidential election. In two days’ time, our world could look dramatically different in our eyes. Half the people in this country and many sitting next to us now will be devastated, while the other half is elated. Half this nation’s population will likely feel threatened in an existential way. The next time we gather together in this space, it could feel very different to all of us...at least it could for all of us whom we can see. The unseen saints who surround us will feel none of the fear or the victory... because they live in the presence of a far greater reality.

Our Psalm names God as the King of Glory. As Christians, the kingdom we serve is not of this world. When the Hebrews spoke of The Lord of Hosts, they were employing a military title. This is the most powerful name for God used in our ancient texts because it frames God as the ruler, strong enough to command the armies of Heaven, strong enough to beat back even death itself. When we lift up our heads and invite the King of Glory to come in, we’re claiming a victorious allegiance with God’s kingdom. I hope that everyone who is able, does in fact vote in this election. I also hope that

regardless of the outcome, we are all able to look to our saints for the comfort of their perspective beyond the grave. As a people freed from blindness, we can see, or at least trust what the saints and angels already know...that God is the ultimate victor.

When the people who observed Jesus' tears complained that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' death because he was able to restore sight to the blind, they didn't understand that it was their own blindness he wanted to heal. Too often what we can see makes us blind to greater truths. We, like Jesus' critics, make judgments about the world based on what we think we know. Like stoic junior highers we risk becoming jaded when we make assessments based on our limited experiences of life. As Christians, we ought to live in expectation of the unexpected! We are resurrection people! We serve a resurrected King alongside a host of saints and angels. Our eyes may not yet see, but if we trust God to heal our spiritual blindness, maybe our hearts will get a glimpse of the unseen worshiping saints among us here this morning.

May we be a people who are confident in our true King's ability to complete the work started at creation, weathering the changes of this life with faithful confidence, and awakened to joyful anticipation of the world beyond the grave. Amen.