

Mirroring Jesus

Menno Mennonite Church

July 11, 2021

Message: We are invited to encounter the risen Christ in the newness of an active relationship.

Purpose: To call ourselves out of the “ordinary” encounter with the Christ we construct for ourselves, but to be challenged by the one who lives still.

Scriptures: Luke 9:1-9, 18-20 (I will read); Psalm 139:1-6; 13-18

Synopsis: How we see Jesus is of primary importance. Jesus, the author is the one in which we put our trust and we seek to shape our lives in ways great and small. Yet, often we are often to see Jesus as a mirror, reflecting the qualities that we want and need to see in a savior. We often place the attitudes and assumptions that are near and dear to us, and baptize them with the sanctity of assuming that these too are Jesus’ attitudes and assumptions, regardless of whether there is evidence or movement of the spirit to support that assumption or not. In doing so, we who are to reflect Christ, end up hoping that Christ will reflect us. But a God and Savior who agrees with us entirely is not a living God, nor one that can convict us or change us. This is why we need the table to bring together ALL the parts of the church so we can be faced with all that Jesus is, not just that which is like us.

This service will include welcoming new members and communion.

Luke 9: 1-9; 18-22

9 When Jesus had called the Twelve together,
he gave them power and authority
to drive out all demons and to cure diseases,
2 and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

3 He told them:
“Take nothing for the journey—
no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt.
4 Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town.
5 If people do not welcome you,
leave their town and shake the dust off your feet
as a testimony against them.”

6 So they set out and went from village to village,
proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on.
And he was perplexed because
some were saying that John had been raised from the dead,
8 others that Elijah had appeared,
and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life.

9 But Herod said, “I beheaded John.
Who, then, is this I hear such things about?”
And he tried to see him.

18 Once when Jesus was praying in private
and his disciples were with him, he asked them,
“Who do the crowds say I am?”

19 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist;
others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

20 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

21 Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone.

22 And he said, “The Son of Man
must suffer many things
and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law,
and he must be killed
and on the third day be raised to life.”

I am guessing I am not alone in saying that I have a love-hate relationship with mirrors. We love them as they are useful, but isn't it a bit funny that they are sometime MOST useful when they are a bit steamed over from the shower. As ubiquitous as they are in day to day life, they are somewhat brutal in showing things just the way they are. We all, somewhat deep down, carry that fascination that we do as infants, wondering and engaging the other child in the mirror, the reflected us that we expect to be a perfect replica. But rarely is it so, because we are not seeing ourselves as we conceive of our selves; we get to see things how they really are. It is like listening to ourselves as a recording, or worse yet, video. I know very few people who can do that without a bit of cringe as we hear not how we think we sound, but how we really sound without the echo chamber of our own heads. It's enough to trigger the stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression before accepting that this is how we really are and getting on with it.

It is said on occasion that Jesus is a mirror of humanity. Outside of Jesus' characteristics often striking us at the ways that humanity often has a long way to travel, it seems a bit of oddity to think of it that way. Because it is Jesus—the first fruit of all humankind—that is meant to be reflected within the lives of those who follow him, not particularly the other way around. We are meant to be the little Christs in the world, casting the sparks and flashes of the Christ light where we find ourselves. We work toward that model with heart mind and soul. Like a mirror he reflects the love of God toward us; that is how it supposed to work, and often does, sometimes without our necessarily recognizing that it is happening.

But is that always the way we look to Jesus? We each have our beloved images and notions of Jesus, stated or not. We have our image of how Jesus is in our life and in our world. Most of the time that image is one that is structured around how we understand God to function, and, like so many before us, what we mean when we declare that “Jesus is the Messiah”. Like the first disciples, and every disciple since, we know what we want to see in Jesus, what we want to see in God. In all the other gospels but this one, Luke, this declaration of Peter's declaring Jesus' identity is followed immediately by Peter's telling Jesus that he is doing the messiah thing all wrong by talking about being handed over to those who hate him to suffer and to die, earning him a rebuke of the first order: get behind me Satan. Many of the fundamental disputes that we have within the church function not particularly on the whys and wherefores of our theological

beliefs as much as they rely on the ways that we interpret Jesus and the priorities that the Messiah has surrounding the issues of the day.

In this way we end up using Jesus as mirror in a quite different way, a more traditional sense of reflecting ourselves. We often look to Jesus not to see the living savior of the world as much as we look for what we wish to see: the powerful politician, the righteous judge, the activist turning the tables, the loving friend, the fierce prophet calling us each to repent. It is all there to be seen and known. We want Jesus to be a whole lot like us every bit as much as we want to be like Jesus. So, like someone trying to see what they are after in the mirror, we suck in our gut, dismiss the increasingly gray hairs, and help us know that perhaps what we see is fully there after all. Seldom do we happily come to the Christ to have our notions, our mirror of Christ shattered by the gospel of Christ, nor would we have a great sense of what to do were the Spirit to move with wind and power in a new way. As quickly as I cite this as a truth of our condition, I am just as quick to recognize that this is precisely the most human thing that we can do with the divine, time and again, no matter our viewpoint. We all would much rather see our own personal ethics, what ever they are, receive the approval of baptism than to suffer the death and rebirth of truly being born anew. So, we seek to see what we can ever bit as much as we come to know a be seen by the searching Christ.

One of my friends from Tucson has what I think is one of the most fascinating jobs that I know. He creates the large primary mirrors for massive telescopes. He spends his days in a lab underneath the stands of the U of A football stadium. We got to tour the place a couple of times. What they do with these mirrors is they have this specialized mold that they fill with highly pure glass. Once it is loaded, they hold it up and spin the mold with the molten glass inside, naturally creating by speed and prediction the basic curve required. After spinning it for some months to cool precisely, then Buddy takes over. He works to polishing these 40-foot diameter mirrors so they have only many times less than a human hair's variance across the whole surface, bouncing lasers up and down to the top of the stands to measure the precision of the thing. He works for years on each mirror, grinding away at the glass. The slightest error ruins millions of dollars and years of work rendering the images useless. Only once the mirror has been so defined and moved on site that a layer of reflecting silver is deposited on the form about 1 atom's depth deep across the form.

As much as I admire his precision (crazy seeming though it may be), I admire even more Buddy's patience. I will always remain impressed by the slow, deliberate, microscopic work that this shaping requires. Which is not unlike our relationship with God. We are shaped time after time to bring more and more of God's way into focus. Yet it will always remain that much out of focus; it has to be. As Paul famously writes "for now we but see through a glass darkly, but in time we will see face to face." This written by a man who had never actually seen truly clear glass—it had not been invented yet and would not be for about 15 centuries. As we work time and again to answer the ever present and ever relevant question of "who do you say that I am", we must understand that any given response does not reflect the whole of Christ. It must be refined. Christ, in order to be the Savior we need him to be must always remain somewhat uncontained and unrestrained by whatever face we would have him wear. It is precisely when we become comfortable with our concept of who Jesus is and what he does for us that we may well need to pay attention as there may be a new image to come and disrupt us, challenge us, and invite us to grow, enlarging our sense of the truth in the matter, incomplete though it may be. If Jesus does not in some way make you uncomfortable or fails to nibble at the edges of your conscious, then you might be missing an important piece of the image of who and what God is. Because as much as God loves us, God also invites each to grow and change as we time and again encounter the Messiah.

This is why communion is so important for us. It is one the habits that we have in symbol and in truth to come and encounter an image of Christ in the ritual, in the bread and cup, in the sharing with the body. It is something that is meant to nourish and change us, to help us remember whose we are. It is easy for us to forget that when we come to the table, we often end up dining with people who see the world, see Jesus in very different ways than we do, whose answers to "and who do you say that I am" may well make us wince. As I watched Mennocon from affair, struggling with my own confirmed fear of missing out of convention, I was reminded again of the work that it is to come to the table. God's table is the table of the Kingdom of God, which is always bigger than what we know or ever imagine. I am not just speaking of the table we share today, or the sense of the table that we are reminded of when we connect to the church beyond ourselves. I am speaking of the universal table at which we also dine with all who claim the name of Christ. We mark the boundaries of our immediate community in the ways seem right to us. It is hard, exhausting work, work that we would more often avoid than

take on. We cannot confuse boundary maintenance with that with the universal table. The universal table of the whole body is always ill defined, because it is not we who get to have the final say. It is God who issues the invitations. It is Christ who is the host. It is we, all of us, who are the guests. It is God who insists that each one of us is worth loving, worth claiming, worth saving, a reality that should always give us pause as we consider our own table manners. We must always remember that the body is bigger than any given part of it that we may see.

Communion is part of the process of polishing our sense of identity in the body, helping us to better reflect Christ's love. It does this by reminding us of what is most essential, grinding away at that which would distort the image of God with us. In taking the bread and the cup, we are invited to extend grace not only to the person across the aisle or around the corner, but most importantly, to ourselves. My body broken for you remains true even if we do not like everything we see in the mirror. My blood shed for a new covenant does not change just because we wonder on occasion if we are really worth the price. That is what the big deal is—grace is extended to us all in the shape of God giving of God's self to us. It is true for us. It is true for those who are least like us. It is true for those people who we least like in the world. It is this big truth that can be so hard to grasp, but so essential in mirroring the fundamental truth of the gospel.

Jesus reflects the nature of the one who created us first and loves us best, even better than we love ourselves. That love is a love that embraces the entirety of creation, even in its cracked, broken state that it now holds. This is the truth of the mirror of Christ. This is the power of the gospel that heals all ills, casts out demons, and helps the blind to see. May we be given eyes to see its reflection as we look for Christ's spark everywhere we turn our heads and be given the courage to declare this healing truth in a world so often dwelling in the shadows, longing for light.