

February 12, 2017
Trinity Episcopal Church, Bend
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Matthew 5: 21-37

We all want to be seen. I think that's right.

But then again, some of us, whether fully conscious of it or not, spend much of our lives masking, working on our personas in hopes we will be perceived a certain way.

For some of us, we want you to think we're nice. I am a case in point. Others may want to present as though they are strong. Impermeable to hurts. Powerful. In control. Some may appear gruff and indifferent. Why? Those of you who are gruff and indifferent, you tell me.

Some of us take up a lot of space. Maybe it feels safer. Some may try to be invisible. An apology for being here at all? Or maybe it's that we would rather not be seen than risk being hurt again.

But somehow, I think that beneath our fears and insecurities and myriad uncertainties, in spite of external events that have shamed us or confused us or embarrassed us, regardless of the relentless internal voice that does the same, I think we all want to be seen. And accepted.

Someone said, I wish I could remember who, When we experience ourselves being perceived we experience love.

What do you make of that? When we experience ourselves being perceived, we experience love.

I am afraid that may not ring true for most of us. Although my guess is we wish it were. The paradox. We want to be seen. And we are scared to death we will be. We want to be loved and accepted. And afraid we won't be. An age old problem.

George Herbert, the Anglican country parson and poet of the 16th century, knows this struggle too. The poets often put ourselves to words, in ways we could not, but recognize.

Listen to George Herbert reflect on being seen. And our reticence.
Interesting that this poem is entitled Love III

“Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack from my first entrance in,
drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning if I lacked anything.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here.
Love said, you shall be that guest.

I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear, I cannot look on Thee.
Love took my hand and smiling did reply, Who made the eyes but I?

Truth, Lord: but I have marr’d them: let my shame go where it doth
deserve.....”

I bear the blame....

Herbert goes on to say, do not bear the blame! Love will bear your pain.
There is nothing you need to do to deserve Love.

“You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat.
So I did sit and eat.”

He endeth the poem.

Taste my meat. A provocative image. Taste my meat. God incarnates.
Carne. Meat. As in chili con carne. God becomes flesh, if you will. Taste
me. Chew on me. Internalize me. Let me nurture you. I am using
somewhat hyperbolic language, as did Herbert. But you get the
message.

God incarnates in Realty. In the Reality of our lives. All of it. Beauty,
truth, goodness. Shame, sadness, sorrow, too. God meets us in us.

I suggest at the occasion of our being here today in this place, and in the
light of this poem, there is nothing you need do to deserve such Love,

such Presence. Here you do not need to be afraid to be seen. It's all right.

Quick eye'd Love will recognize your hesitancy and your hunger. Here a place for you.

Now, what about that Gospel this morning. Okay, so you may not be a murderer but if you have anger against your brother or sister you will be liable to judgment just as a murderer is. Or the verse made famous by Jimmy Carter's reference to it, if you have lust in your heart, consider it adultery. And Matthew goes on, if your hand offends you, cut it off. And if your eye offends, tear it out.

(I much prefer the way George Herbert puts it. I, the unkind, the ungrateful? Ah my dear, I cannot look on Thee.)

Okay, so Matthew is calling us to self-examination at a deep level. Urging us to seek congruity within and without.

Matthew's language I suggest is hyperbolic, too. For emphasis. So you get the message. He is calling the early disciples of Jesus to exemplary action. And maturity. Like Paul is doing in his letter to the Corinthians. Grow up. It's time.

My concern with our Gospel today is that its tone sounds awfully punitive, like a critical parent who's about had it. An all too familiar voice. And can't you just see a finger shaking in your face. And then we go around feeling guilty of dust and sin. Which we all are and I don't mean that disparagingly. We all have stuff. We all get confused and mess up. We all disappoint or self sabotage. And we all have blind spots. We all have stuff. And secrets.

As a pastor I assure you I will keep your stuff and secrets just between us. But as a pastor I can also assure you, we all have them.

George Herbert knows that, too. And so does Love.

When we experience ourselves being perceived it is love. What an interesting thought. Or insight.

And how liberating that would be. To not need to apologize for ourselves. Or be afraid. Or cower. Or bow our heads and demure our eyes in shame. Love is experiencing yourself being perceived...When Love is present you do not need to run for cover or fear exposure. In fact, Love bades us welcome. Bade is old an English word for bid or command or direct. Love bids us welcome. Love commands us, welcome. Love directs us: come, and be well.

Matthew's gospel this morning, and many other verses in Matthew attributed to Jesus, are filled with punitive intensity. Rather than feeling like we are seen in a loving way, Matthew makes it sound more like "I've been watching you! Every move you make, every step you take, I'll be watching you!" It's kinda creepy. And then, when you offend, out with your eye! or off with your hand! or any other member that means a lot to you. My dears, that sounds more like the Queen of Hearts from Alice in Wonderland than Jesus of Nazareth, our healer and Prince of Peace.

Don't assume everything Matthew attributes to Jesus as gospel truth. Don't be misled by those red-letter editions of the Bible. Listen for the voice of Jesus. Jesus is surely a truth teller. He often doesn't mince words. But he is not cruel. Or mean. Or violent. Listen for Jesus' voice. You will recognize it. It is very different from Matthew's.

These times are trying enough. My sense is, we are all a bit overwhelmed...maybe for different reasons. But we are feeling a bit battered by the news from one side or the other. And nervous about what these tides of change mean for us and for our world. The last thing I think we need today is for us to feel even worse about ourselves or more suspicious about "them."

I don't want any of us to feel smote today after hearing our Gospel. Smote. That's another old English word. To be hit hard, as with a hand or a stick or a weapon.

I think we can take the urgency of our gospel seriously....without taking it literally. Seek congruity. Honesty. Authenticity. Let your yes be yes and your no, no as our Gospel says.

I suggest that we cannot heal our lives if we are unsure of our ultimate worth and value. If we are afraid that being seen may reveal our guilt and sin and only that, we will hide, and mask, we will deceive and blame and shame and our primary wounds will never heal. God incarnates into Reality. There is nowhere you have been or will go where God will not go with you. Some may disagree with me. Good, let's talk about it. But I suggest that Love indeed bids us welcome. We do not need to be afraid to be seen by Love. Today, in this place, I urge you to consider: you are deeply known and held and sustained by God. Loved and accepted. Does that sound too good to be true? You do not need to risk being known and loved by God. You already are.

Taste my meat says Love. As graphic as tear out your eye, but oh, so different. Taste my meat. I welcome you. Come to me. Ravish me. Let me fill you with intense delight. I behold you. And see your hunger. Here, a place for you. Come, my dear, and sit and eat.

Am I a worthy guest? And not just a guest, but Lover, too? Can we be loved and Lover? Can we be for others what Love can be for us? Yes. Yes.