

DO THEY SEE JESUS IN YOU?

A sermon by Dr. J. Matthew Burton, Jr.

Central United Methodist Church

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(Galatians 6:7-16) Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. {8} If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. {9} So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. {10} So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. {11} See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! {12} It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised--only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. {13} Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. {14} May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. {15} For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! {16} As for those who will follow this rule--peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

CHRISTIAN PROTOCOL

Dr. Marc de Leval is one of Europe's leading cardiologists. Between 1987 and 1993, he performed 104 "*arterial switch*" operations at the Ormond Street Hospital in London England. The surgery was designed to correct a congenital heart defect in infants. The surgery on a high percentage of the patients was a successful but too many of the infants were dying after being transferred to ICU. In 1994, Dr. Leval published a paper about his struggle to figure out why these infants were dying. Not all the deaths could be attributed to the risky procedure or hospital equipment. He finally decided that it had to do with poor performance by either himself or one of his team members. As he begin to work on the problem, he determined the handoff between the surgical and ICU teams was the problem.

In 2003, Dr. Goldman and surgeon Martin Elliott slumped onto a couch in the break room of their hospital. Both were fans of formula one racing and so they immediately tuned the TV to a race. After watching the race that day, Goldman and Elliott realized that the 20-man pit crew was extremely efficient. They could change 4 tires, fill the gas tank, adjust

the airfoils, get the driver a drink and clean the filters all within a 7-second window. The pit crew made their hospital staff look like a bunch of shade tree mechanics. Sometime later they invited members of a formula 1 racing team pit crew to come and share with them their procedures for making the team work so efficiently. They learned that the team was obsessed with recording every tiny mistakes and then correcting it.

Armed with the details of what they learned, Goldman and Elliott begin to examine every detail of the handoff between the surgery team and the ICU team. The result was that technical errors fell by 42 percent and information errors fell over 49 percent. They learned that the handoff could make the difference between life and death. I guess the old saying is true, *“The devil is in the details.”*

Paul had carefully trained a core group to start a church in Galatia but somewhere along the way, the handoff got fumbled. The new leaders immediately became demanding and legalistic. They set up guidelines and rules that would indicate who was *“in”* and who was *“out.”* They forgot the most important detail—modeling Christ and being Christ to those who didn’t know him. O How quickly we human beings slip into bad behavior.

I remember Dee Brown writing in his book, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, that when President Grant sent a commissioner to convince the Native Americans in the Washington Territory to accept government schools, that the following interchange took place between the commissioner and the Chief:

“Why do you NOT want schools?” the commissioner asked.
“They will teach us to have churches,” the chief replied. *“Do you not want churches? NO, we do not want churches. They will teach us to quarrel about God, we do not want to learn that. We*

may quarrel with men sometimes about things on this earth, but we never quarrel about God. We do not want to learn that.”

I cannot help but think of a Henri Nouwen quote, *“If, in order to defeat the beast, we become the beast, the beast has won.”*

THE MARKS OF JESUS

Paul was in a constant struggle with his newly forming communities of faith as they drifted towards exclusionary tactics rather than an inclusionary strategy. The Galatians wanted to quibble over issues of the law like circumcision and uncircumcision. Paul sternly warned them that following Christ had nothing to do with any earthly laws but rather with representing Christ in the world.

We easily get caught up in the wrong things. I’ll never my first church, an appointment I received while still a student at Duke Divinity School. At my first Administrative Council, meeting the main topic of debate was not about how we could reach people in our community for Christ. It wasn’t even about worship, Sunday school, missions or program. In my first meeting in God’s church, we debated for 45 minutes about whether to buy a whole or half case of toilet paper.

Surgeons that don’t pay attention to the most important things loose patients. Churches that focus on maintenance and survival lose their souls to the world and change nothing. Churches that focus on being Christ to the world change lives and make an eternal difference. Christ is life. Do we model his life in all we do?

Gandhi once said, *“I might have become a Christian, but for the Christians that I have known.”*

Gandhi observation is a sad commentary on the history of Christianity. I believe we are standing at a crossroads, maybe even a new awakening for God’s church. We can begin once again to transform lives and even

the world if we will model the mind, hand and heart of Christ in our lives.

WE NEED MINDS LIKE JESUS

We need a mind like Jesus. We don't need a fundamentalism that obscures the face of a compassionate God and wipes away the best principles of the Christian heritage in favor of a hard moralism where the demonic dimension overshadows the loving dimension of the gospel. It is disturbing to read stories like the one I read this week about the college student, who wrote Brennan Manning:

“I got involved with a youth group at my church that made me fear for my salvation and be afraid of God. It was a terrorist spirituality, and I decided that there was no point in going to church anymore.”¹

We need a Christianity where Christ's disciples model the mind of Christ. Christ had compassion for his enemies, the sick, downtrodden, and outcasts. Do we model Christ in the way we think about our neighbor, in the way we view the world and manage our attitude about those with whom we disagree or oppose? Having the mind of Christ will force us to work on those areas where we tend to veer off the path of grace.

WE NEED HANDS LIKE JESUS

Michael J. Christensen tells the story of how Mother Teresa started her first orphanage in Calcutta. It's a story I've never heard.

Mother Teresa started out as a nun like so many others but she had a vision for an orphanage. She shared her dream with her superior. ***“Well, how much money do you have?”*** asked the Mother Superior. ***“I have two pennies!”*** replied Sister Teresa. ***“Oh, you cannot start an orphanage with just two pennies,”*** said the

¹Brennan Manning, *A Glimpse of Jesus: The Stranger to Self-hatred* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003), 15.

Mother Superior. ***“No, but with two pennies and God I can start an orphanage,”*** replied Sister Teresa.²

The rest is history as they say. A crucial part of helping others see Jesus is being His hands. When you help at the homeless shelter, Turning Point (The battered Women’s shelter), Crisis Assistance, Habitat for Humanity, Rock the Block, VBS, Upward or so many of the other wonderful programs of our community and church, you are being the hands of Christ. You are being the hands of Christ when you simply lay your hands on someone’s shoulder and say, ***“I care.”***

WE NEED A HEART LIKE JESUS

Finally, we cannot have the mind or hands of Jesus without first having the heart of Jesus. Without the heart of Jesus, we end up being like the woman who accompanied her husband to the doctor’s office. After his checkup, the doctor called the wife into his office alone. He said Without the heart of Jesus, we end up being like the woman who accompanied her husband to the doctor’s office. After his checkup, the doctor called the wife into his office alone. He said, ***“Your husband is suffering from a very severe disease, combined with horrible stress. If you don’t do the following, your husband will surely die:***

“Each morning fix him a healthy breakfast. Be pleasant and make sure he’s in a good mood. For lunch make him a nutritious meal he can take to work. And for dinner prepare an especially nice meal for him. Don’t burden him with chores, and don’t discuss your problems with him, as this would only contribute to his stress. Try to relax your husband in the evening by wearing giving him plenty of back rubs. Encourage him to watch some type of sporting event on TV. And see to it that you satisfy his every whim. If you can do this for 10 months to a year, I think your husband will regain his health completely.”

²Michael J. Christensen, *The Samaritan’s Imperative* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 113.

On the way home the husband asked his wife, ***“What did the doctor say? YOU’RE GONNA DIE,*** she replied.

All humor aside, having the heart of Jesus opens our eyes and ears to the world around us. It pushes back our cynicism and critical self. The heart of Jesus leads to outer expressions of love and commitment that come from an inner expression of who we really are.

I read a true story this week about Calvin Miller who is an author and currently serves on the faculty at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School. Several years ago, when he was the Senior Pastor at Westside church in Omaha, Nebraska, he was returning from a speaking engagement with 3,000 teenagers. He was on a plane and dog tired. All he wanted to do was get home. In order to get some rest, he took out his Bible and pulled it close to his face because he knew if he was reading his Bible, nobody would bother him. He prayed that the Lord would give him a few hours of peace and quiet.

After several minutes of flight, Miller became aware of a young man crying in the seat beside him. The fellow looked to be 19 or 20 years old. Calvin said he quickly prayed, ***“Lord, he’s not mine. All my sinners are on the ground in Omaha.”*** But the young man kept crying, so Miller finally put his Bible down and said, ***“Son, I don’t know why you’re crying, but if there is anything I can do to help, I’d like to.”***

The young man then told him that his mother, father, and little sister had been killed in a car wreck the day before in Asheville, North Carolina. They were on vacation, and he alone survived. Now he was going home. Miller says he suddenly grew very still and silent at the enormity of the young man’s pain. Finally he said, ***“I don’t know what you must be feeling. I can’t imagine this, but I know someone who understands it perfectly.”*** He took the Bible he had been hiding behind and shared with the young man about the comfort of Christ.

When the plane got to Omaha, the young man continued in his flight, so Miller called a friend of his at the destination and arranged for the friend to meet the young man at the airport and help him get home.

An incredible gift has been passed to you and me. Don't drop the ball. Be the mind, the hands and the heart of Christ in all you do so that everyone whom you meet will see Jesus. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.