

SERMON

“What do you see?”

Dear God,

Please help us to truly see what is real and what is not, to see You and Your greatness – Your Amazing Love - and how it fills the world. Please help us not to be misled by that which the world and our human eyes so frequently see as “great.” I ask now that you bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of each heart. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from our God who sees all, who knows all, and who loves all. Amen.

Well, I have a confession for you this morning. I seem to be addicted to a show streaming on Netflix entitled “Call the Midwife.” For those of you unfamiliar, it’s a BBC series that originally aired in the US on PBS around 10 years ago. It’s based on the actual memoirs of a nurse midwife set in 1950’s/60’s London’s East side and tells the story of the Anglican nursing nuns of Nonnatus House. This order is particularly devoted to midwifery, and they share not only their practice, but also their home, with a number of fellow nurses who are not nuns.

With this background, I would like to introduce Sister Monica Joan, a character in her 80’s who suffers bouts of dementia and even depression, but who also loves God and life and the world and frequently offers the most profound insights, despite her dementia. There is an episode where one of the younger nurses, who is not a nun, makes a mistake that nearly has deadly consequences. Miraculously, the baby survives, but the nurse is left with questions and doubts and fear. She says she doesn’t believe in God, but Sister Monica Joan says that doesn’t matter one mote or iota because the nurse has done her work, as she has been called to. Then Sister announces her observation, “The hands of the Almighty are so often to be found at the ends of our own arms.”

You see, Sister Monica Joan **really sees things** in the world that other people miss, even though she suffers from confusion and dementia. She knows that God works

through people doing good work and caring for others, whether or not they are able to recognize His Hands. Regardless of whether they verbalize belief in God or not, by their actions they are living out God's Love and are surrounded by God's Grace. Every one of us who has ever lived has experienced some unexpected unearned outcome in some area of our lives. Maybe it was an accident somehow avoided or a test passed in spite of too little study or comprehension. Maybe it was forgiveness that was undeserved. Maybe like the nurse, it was a mistake whose consequences didn't materialize. We don't want to forget or trivialize these moments. We want to really see and remember, because these are real and true and a gift. God is still working and God is still speaking. Can we see this? Do we see this?

In Mark's Gospel lesson for today, Jesus responds to one of the disciples who doesn't truly see what is lasting and real. This disciple is marveling at the great buildings and massive stones of the temple area and exclaims to Jesus in admiration. Basically, Jesus tells him – these buildings ain't so great! Not one stone will remain upon another. It will all fall.

Now remember – the temple was SO much more than just a building to the Jewish people of this time period. It was the center of their way of life and culture; it was where they came to be with God. So when Jesus told them it would be thrown down, that was super extra scary to hear.

For more perspective, I think it's also important to look back just a few verses prior – to the way chapter 12 ends. Jesus has just battled words and wits with the scribes, and he warns as he teaches in the temple to beware of them. They wear flowing robes that swirl and catch the eye. They demand the best seats and gobble up the property of widows and expect all kinds of special treatment. One does not have to look far to see the same sort of people in our day! Jesus is saying this - that which appears to observers as all fancy and elite, distinguished even, needs to be regarded with caution. Our human thirst for attention, status, and/or popularity is not to be trusted! Furthermore, those who expect or demand such things are not bringing about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus goes on to point out a poor widow putting in a tiny offering in contrast to all the rich congregants who are putting in great sums. Jesus notes that though it doesn't look like much in comparison to the large amounts of others, in proportion to what she has, her offering is by far the most generous. Once again, how things look to our human eyes are not always the way they really are.

And it is directly following this teaching, as they leave the temple, that the disciple points out to Jesus how great the buildings are! Once again, talk about not getting it!! It would be like leaving here today and leaving God behind, going through the rest of the week without noticing our own work in the world or those who need help, those who are honestly striving to make the world a better place, the hungry, or the hurting. Never a finger lifted or a penny offered nor a prayer said...

We are not so very different from that disciple, are we? We can very easily get busy and wrapped up in our own lives, our own cares, our hurts, our celebrations. We can get lost in the overload of news and information and the shouts of doom and war and famine. We can even get lost in "Call the Midwife" if we aren't careful! We are besieged by the constant stream of headlines and urgent issues competing for our attention. If that doesn't capture us, we can be drawn by the siren song of escapism – with so many different entertainment platforms available to us at the touch of a finger. They are continuous and ongoing – literally 24/7.

Don't get me wrong, the issues are real, and I'm not trying to trivialize any of them. Entertainment is fine, and rest is good. But if we listen to Jesus and look for Jesus, we begin to see the world more clearly. We can remember that God created it – and us – as good. Very good even. We can shift our focus from gloom and doom and regain hope. Instead of distracting ourselves from problems or being overwhelmed by them, we can find ways to address them. We can do the next good thing, no matter how small it may seem.

If we go back to today's lesson, we see that Peter, Andrew, James, and John speak privately with Jesus after his comment about the buildings coming down; no doubt out of their concern. They wanted to know when this would happen and what signs there would be. Probably they wanted to be prepared and to be able to care for their loved ones through such a devastating event. So they took their fears and their questions to Jesus. This is no small thing. Never forget that we can do the same!

Here's the thing, though. Jesus didn't give them times or dates or even things to look for necessarily. Instead, he warns them that some would try to mislead them and some would claim to be coming in Jesus' name in order to deceive many. In fact, he uses the very same word for "See" or "Beware" (as in *See that you aren't fooled*) that he used when he told them to make note of the great buildings that would all come tumbling down, the same word he used to warn them of the scribes. (*Blepo*) *See/Behold/Beware* – as Jesus directs us. He tells us that there will be wars and troubles, yet we cannot put our faith in that which will not sustain us. We can and should continue to work for good, but it will need to be work for the good of all and not just those we agree with or like. During this Stewardship season here at Good Shepherd, we have a real opportunity once again to SEE where God is calling us.

Richard Rohr, my favorite Franciscan priest and writer, spoke these words about Jesus showing us another way to respond to the world. He said, "The way to do justice is to live simply, to not cooperate with consumerism, with militarism, with all the games that have us trapped.

Jesus just does it differently, ignoring unjust systems and building up a better system by his teaching to his disciples. His name for the better system was the kingdom of God or the reign of God. The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better. He's showing us 'We're just going to do it better. Let's not be anti-anything. Let's be *for* something: for life, and for universal love.'"

Perhaps this message from Jesus – and reiterated by Father Richard - can remind us that when we see things of the world that catch our eye and too much of our

attention, we should be cautious. When we hear reports of disaster, we should know that this is not the end. We can do what we can do to bring about the reign of God; we can see the LOVE that abounds; and we can leave the rest to God. Amen.