

***Grace mercy & peace from God our Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ.***

In elementary school I was ***an average student***. I raised my hand every once in a while when my teacher asked for an answer, answered most of the questions the teachers asked me correctly, and generally did okay in all my subjects. Apparently, looking at my progress reports, I needed a little remedial work in the shoe tying, zipper zipping and pays attention in class areas. What can I say, we are who we are, and sometimes I still find I could use some remediation in those areas.

In the sixth grade my teacher ***Ms. Hall called my mother in for a special conference***. I was certain I was in some sort of trouble – there were no shortage of things I could have been found out on, but I was a kid, right. When we all sat down Ms. Hall asked a question: *“Mrs. Schier, has John’s vision been tested recently? He squints a lot, and seems to have difficulty reading the blackboard from his seat.”*

I was ***relieved, thinking I’d dodged a bullet. But then I recall feeling insulted***, thinking, *“Hey, what’s she talking about? I see just fine; thank you very much. Just as good as anyone else. Who does she think she is saying I’m not seeing things clearly? I’m not going to be one of those dorks with glasses!”*

The next week mom and I went on base to see the eye doctor, and sure enough, the doctor said my vision did need some correction. Apparently, I was near sighted, and had an astigmatism against the rule, whatever that means. It was all just words to me. Still, I was convinced that my vision was fine; ***I saw things as clearly as I ever had.***

Two weeks later I got glasses. I recall being ***amazed at how far I could see***, and all the things there were to look at, and I could read everything Ms. Hall wrote on the blackboard. ***Having corrective lenses turned me from a B student to a straight “A” student overnight. In fact, everything from shagging flies in baseball to accurately casting my fishing rod got better.*** I must say, however,

that being able to see everything all the time didn't improve my distractibility one single bit, which may have also been noted on my report card, and *it provided absolutely no assistance in the shoe tying and zipper zipping departments.*

I bring all this up because all of our *Scriptures this morning speak of eyes or have something to do with how people see things less than clearly.* In Ezekiel the Lord uses a hearing metaphor to describe the people's rebellion to God's ways, but clearly, *they aren't grasping the Lord's writing on the blackboard.*

*In Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church,* the apostle seeks to *correct a mistaken perception* of him as someone who does not look like the Corinthian's image of a leader of the church. When we read Paul we always need to remember that he's most often responding to someone else's letter to him. *In this case it seems clear that Paul responds to accusations that his physical infirmity – and lack of an Adonis-like robustness – disqualifies him as a credible leader.* To be fair, Paul apparently was not a particularly impressive looking guy. In the 'Acts of Paul and Thecla,' written about A. D. 150, Paul is described as “*small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, well built, with eyebrows meeting; rather long nosed.*”

Paul's responds by telling them that they are seeing things through the lens of human perception and values. Yet, *those very things testify to his impeccable qualifications as one who in weakness places his dependence entirely on God through faith in Jesus. True vision comes through faith and trust in Jesus Christ rather than through the outward appearance the eyes observe. Outward indications demonstrate little about a person's standing in God's favor.* Commending our circumstances to Jesus care though trust and faith demonstrate our true standing as people of God.

The world would have us look upon a person's undesirable circumstances and appearance as indicators of being in God's favor. *Paul suggests that trusting God in these cases is a testimony to having received God's favor, just as Jesus trusted the Father and Spirit on the cross despite any outward signs to suggest standing before the Father.*

*Our misperception of what favor with God looks like keeps us from being able to read what's actually written on the blackboard.* So Paul . corrects our vision.

Our gospel reading reveals a similar theme. The *worldly perception and judgment of the people of Nazareth prevent them from seeing Jesus as the Son of God standing right in front of them.* Their comments expose two implicit judgments of Jesus. They *first* refuse to see Jesus as God's Son because of *His trade – “the carpenter.”* *God would certainly not use a carpenter as a messenger, ambassador or agent to humanity.* Carpenters have *no higher education*, no formal theological training, *no mystical or religious credentials*; most cannot even read. *God would not use a carpenter much less come as one.*

*But God does come among us in the flesh as a carpenter.*

The second condemnation of Jesus comes when they defame Him as – *“son of Mary.”* *Most of us don't pick up on this* because we believe the story of Jesus, and *hold Mary in high esteem as the mother of the Son of God*, we *don't perceive “son of Mary” as a condemnation or judgment, but it certainly was that day.*

Let me explain. *The custom in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was to identify and associate any self-respecting person by their father, not their mother – take “Simon bar Jonah”, the “sons of Zebedee,” even “Judas son of Iscariot.”* *By referring to Jesus as “son of Mary” the people of Nazareth identify and belittle Jesus as a man with a questionable paternal bloodline – an illegitimate child.* Clearly, *God would not stoop so low as to identify Godself with a person of such ill repute. God would certainly not use a “b\_\_tard” as a messenger, ambassador or agent to humanity. And God definitely would not come among us as a “b\_\_tard”. **But God does.***

The people of Nazareth disqualify and disparage Jesus based on His worldly status, but they appear to be *quite nearsighted.* *We all fall victim to the temptation to judge* and identify others by our own worldly standards and opinions, but our gospel reading suggests that doing so may well prevent us from

realizing one of God's people is right in front of us. **Hence, Jesus repeatedly – perhaps even constantly – tells those who follow Him, “Do not Judge.” “Do not Judge.” “Do not Judge.”**

**Just to make it abundantly clear.** In the wake of the people of Nazareth's nearsightedness, **Jesus sends out the twelve two by two and gives them authority over unclean spirit; He gives them authorization and ability to use the God's power. They are fishermen, tax collectors, lowly people who earned their living by the sweat of their brow.** Among them **Jesus does not include a single person from a high priestly family, or the Aaronic priesthood, or the Levites. There is not a learned Scribe, Sadducee, Pharisee or even leader of a synagogue.**

**No, Jesus chooses and uses fishermen, Tax collectors, the formerly demon possessed (Mary Magdalene), the blind, the lame, the deaf and dumb, a persecutor of the Church, the judgmental, and any other sinner who will follow and willingly identify themselves as sinners as messengers, ambassadors and agents of God's healing kingdom on this earth.**

**Look around you brothers and sisters.** Look at yourselves. **You may see something that disqualifies a person – including yourself – as an effective servant of God, and yet the struggles and conditions for which the world judges us – including ourselves, are the very things that drive a person to seek God's mercy and fall at Christ's feet seeking help, forgiveness, and compassion. These things make us long to live in God's presence.**

My friends, when Jesus cur worldview – our prejudices and opinions – into question, we may feel insulted and think the way we see the world and others is “just fine; thank you very much.” And yet, **putting on the corrective lenses of God's kingdom helps us see the world, others, and ourselves through the Lord's forgiving eyes. Doing so enlarges our circle of friends, increases the size of our family and improves most everything. Turns out, it's not so bad being one of those dorks who sees the world through different lenses after all.**

**Amen !**