

The Gift of Sight

Last Sunday after Pentecost – November 19/20, 2005

Christ the King Sunday
Sermon Background Study

Psalm 100 (NRSV)

¹Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

²Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

³Know that the LORD is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

⁵For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

Ephesians 1:15-23 (NRSV)

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

We have so much for which we are thankful. But above all else, we are thankful that this is God's world and that we belong to him.

"The Eyes of Your Heart"

We all see the world through a pair of glasses. We bring assumptions, expectations, attitudes, biases, and sensitivities to the world and our place in it. We point out other people's "blind spots," though we are blind to our own. Some of us see a "half-empty glass", while others see it as "half full." We speak of "rose-colored glasses." The glasses through which we see the world are inescapable, the only question is what sort of spectacles we'll wear. Will we see, as the psalmist put it, that this is God's world and "we are his?" Or will we see a world in which we imagine ourselves to be the masters of our fate and the captains of our souls?

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul prays that the Christians will see the world and themselves through a pair of God-given glasses, through a lens shaped by God's creativity and love. Here is how Eugene Peterson paraphrases Paul's prayer in *The Message*:

Old Hundredth

Psalm 100 is one of the most familiar of the psalms, perhaps second only to the 23rd. The psalm is brief and its message is simple: *God is good and we are his.*

A version of Psalm 100 was set to music nearly 450 years ago by William Kethe, a friend of John Knox, the great reformer. The tune was composed by Louis Bourgeois, who composed for John Calvin. The tune became known as *Old Hundredth* after Psalm 100, even though Bourgeois first composed it as a tune for a paraphrase of Psalm 134. Like St. Andrew, many congregations now sing *Old Hundredth* as the doxology (lit., "the word of glory and praise") each week during worship services. The original Kethe/Bourgeois hymn is #75 in the UMC Hymnal, "All People That on Earth Do Dwell." The *Old Hundredth* doxology is #95 in our hymnal.¹

It goes against our grain to proclaim that we belong to God, that God has purchased us at an incalculable price, as the apostle Paul put it. Yet, "we are his" – all we are, all we have. My life is not my own. I am not free so that I can do anything with my life that I choose. I am free so that I may live my life as God created me to live it – loving him and loving neighbor.

There is no part of us that is not God's. Were God not good, then belonging lock-stock-and-barrel to God wouldn't be joyful. But *God is good*. God defines good. Thus, we can be thankful that not only are we God's, but that we know God. We know our LORD. We have much to be thankful for, much to remember as we gather for Thanksgiving, but, foremost, we are thankful that we are God's – his people and the sheep of his pasture.

1. from J. Clinton McCann Jr.'s commentary on the Psalms in *The New Interpreter's Bible*. This commentary set is available in the St. Andrew library.

"I ask—ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory—to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for Christians, oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him—endless energy, boundless strength!

Seeing intelligently, with clear and focused vision, reveals a world that is God's. It is a world filled with far too much suffering, brokenness, death, and destruction, but it is still God's world. When we see clearly, when the "eyes of our hearts" have been opened, then we grasp that God is at work even in the

Bible Sunday in the UMC

Today marks Bible Sunday, the beginning of Bible Week in the UMC. It is a time when we can reflect upon the place of the Bible in our church and in our lives.

Following the lead of its founder, John Wesley, the UMC proclaims: "We believe that the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, reveals the Word of God so far as it is necessary for our salvation. It is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice."¹

Regrettably, for much of the last half of the 20th century, the Bible was little used and little taught in many UMC congregations. However, in the late 80's this began to change as clergy and lay leadership called for the UMC to once again embrace God's Word so that "we may come to know the truth of the biblical message in its bearing on our own lives and the life of the world."¹

Several years ago, we recommitted our church to the biblical faith. The St. Andrew Bible Academy was created and began to offer a variety of classes aimed at helping us all to better understand, appreciate, and apply Scripture. The Bible Academy is built around three eight-week sessions each year. Winter classes this year will begin the week of January 9th. There will be a variety of classes offered: large, lecture-oriented classes and smaller discussion-oriented classes; daytime and evening; books of the Bible will be studied as well as books *about* the Bible.

In addition to Bible Academy, we will be offering new *Disciple* classes (a discussion-based UMC Bible curriculum) as well as *Alpha*, an exciting and incredibly popular introduction to the basics of the Christian faith. We hope that you will prayerfully consider enrolling in a class.

Many of us will also be reading *Thru the Bible* in 2006 as the St. Andrew pastors preach through the entire Bible as well. More information on this can be found on the back page of this study.

A deeper understanding and daily reading of the Bible will enrich and strengthen your faith and your life, for it is "through Scripture [that] the living Christ meets us in the experience of redeeming grace."¹ But it is possible only if we will make the time to read!

1. These quotes are from *The Book of Discipline of the UMC - 2004*, which contains the governing documents of the United Methodist Church.

middle of the messes we've made. In a word, we'll see God's "power"¹ at work. It is a bit like peering at the stars through a good telescope for the first time. The stars and galaxies have always been there, you've just never been able to see them before. God is at work in the world every day and in many ways, but far too few people see it for what it is. They see a life filled with coincidences rather than seeing that God is working in and through them. I've come to believe that there is a simple way to see where God is working in my life. *Wherever there is life and not death, love and not hate, reconciliation and not estrangement - in all those places we find God at work.* God works in and through our lives to create righteousness out of our selfishness and pride.

A power beyond our comprehension

For Paul, the greatest display of God's power was the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was not merely brought back from the dead as if he was resuscitated on an operating dead, God brought Jesus through death to new life, new eternal bodily life. Such power is reserved for God alone. Such power dwarfs whatever power we think we might be able to muster on our own - economic, political, military. The irony is that we live in a world obsessed with power, yet so many fail to acknowledge the greatest power of all - the power of God.

God not only put this power to work in raising Jesus from the dead but also in exalting him, that is, seating him at God's right hand and making him Lord over all "rule and authority and power and dominion, and above very name that is named" (v. 21). It is the power of God that lies behind that Christian claim that Jesus is Lord and Master - of everything, everyone, every place . . . all of it. Thanks be to God! We are his.

Being thankful

The Engle family has much to be thankful for this Thanksgiving. Health, happiness, friends, family, money in the bank, and the rest. But foremost, we are thankful that our Lord is Jesus and that we know him, not as well as we'd always like . . . but we know him. It is a good thing to have a good king and to know him! We are also thankful that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead works through each of us, helping us to be a brighter light to the world, for it is to this that we have been called. Profound gratefulness is the only sensible response to such a privilege.

¹In the space of thirteen words, Paul uses "power" three times! See verses 19 and 20.

Daily Bible Readings

(more readings on Christ the King Sunday)

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24 The Sovereign Lord will look after his sheep</p>	<p>Day 2 Jeremiah 23:1-6 The LORD will gather together the remnant of his flock.</p>
<p>Day 3 John 18:33-37 "Are you the king of the Jews?" Pilate asks.</p>	<p>Day 4 Colossians 1:15-23 The supremacy of the Son of God</p>
<p>Day 5 Matthew 25:31-46 What will the King ask us when he comes in all his glory?</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

Sermon Notes

November Book Recommendation

Understanding Islam: An Introduction to the Muslim World

by Thomas W. Lippman (Second Revised Edition)

Available at *Inspiration*, the St. Andrew Bookstore

Thru the Bible in a Year

Many of us at St. Andrew will be reading the Bible through next year. This is not some massive new program (even if it sounds like it) but a simple invitation to join us in devoting 20 minutes or so a day to Scripture so that we might all be renewed and transformed, becoming evermore Christlike. The Spiritual Disciplines, such as regular Bible reading, are how we go about our spiritual training.

The reading plan will be distributed to everyone at St. Andrew. The plan will not take us straight from Genesis to Revelation, but will, instead, be built on reading book-by-book from the Old and New Testaments: Genesis then Matthew then Exodus then Acts and so on. Many of us will be using the new *Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible* (NRSV) put together by Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson, Dallas Willard and others. We are getting copies of this Bible at a much reduced price. Copies will be available for \$25 outside the bookstore beginning on Sunday, December 4. (What a gift idea for Christmas!) Of course, any Bible will do. As someone once said, the best Bible for you is the one that you'll read.

We hope you'll consider joining us.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The place to begin this week is to consider the “glasses” through which we view the world. What glasses do you wear? How do they shape your interpretation of events and possibilities? What sorts of glasses do you see others wearing? How does a pair of Christ-shaped glasses differ from those that are human-shaped? What are some concrete examples of how or where or when they differ? How might our Christ-shaped glasses help us to understand the nature of real power? How is the power of God evident in your own life? In the lives of those around you?

How hard it is for us to hear God's message that our lives are not our own, but, rather, belong to him. We are not self-made men and women; we are made by God. In the 19th Century, William Henley wrote, “I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.” These words resonate within the hearts of many Americans, but they are not pleasing to God. In contrast to Henley, Clinton McCann writes, “Genuine life is lived in submission to God.” Discuss the quotes from Henley and McCann. Which do you find more appealing? Which best states your own desires and emotions? How might thanksgivings offered up by Henley and McCann differ? Here's a hint. In the same poem, “Invictus,” Henley wrote, “I thank whatever gods may be, for my unconquerable soul.”