

WHAT DO THEY SEE WHEN THEY LOOK AT ME?**1 Peter 2:12-25****(Read 1 Peter 2:12-25)**

INTRO: Someone's watching you. What do they see? Better yet, who do they see when they're looking at you? Do they see you, or do they see Jesus? I've told you before of my shock at the age of 15, when I reached over and beeped the horn of my brother's blue '72 VW Bug because the car passing us had a bumper sticker that read *HONK IF YOU LOVE JESUS*. I was shocked not because my brother had it rigged with an electrical jolt if an errant little brother tried something funny. Instead I was shocked because the driver flipped us off. I was shocked because I loved Jesus and I did what his bumper sticker told me to do. But he obviously thought we were beeping at him for passing us like a maniac, which he did on road that was too narrow to do so. He also obviously forgot whom he represented with the bumper sticker. Yes, we stand for someone. I, in my teenage naivete, was standing for Jesus. Who he was standing for is up for debate – but it was Jesus.

I wore a couple of my Ashland Theological Seminary polo shirts on our vacation trip last week. They have a bumper sticker of sorts on the left breast that say I stand for something. But I wasn't really thinking about that as I pulled them on in the morning. I just knew the wonderful New Mexico autumn weather was permitting me to do so. But, even though I wasn't thinking about it, it quickly came to mind when at least three people in one day asked me if I was from Oregon. You see, they were looking at my shirt and since there is an Ashland in Oregon, and most every other state, they jumped to a familiar conclusion. It made me realize the responsibility of not shaming the name of the Christian institution I was representing with my shirt. Fortunately, with Kathy as my witness I think did pretty good at not making Christians look bad with my choice of shirts.

The truth is though, we are representatives of Christ no matter what is written on our shirt. We are his witnesses no matter what we are wearing which means we need to think about what our Tee shirts say or, especially for our sisters in Christ, how revealing our clothing is. We are his representatives and that means we need to be mindful of what we post on Facebook and what kind of jokes we tell. People are watching and since we are Christ FOLLOWERS, we are to strive to hold his name up rather than besmirching it. Lord knows we don't need any more of that.

- People are watching, and in order to transform this culture we live in, we need to exhibit the difference Christ makes when we become new creations in him. All too often though we do not.
- All too often Christians are not good neighbors. All too often Christians are not good citizens. All too often Christians are really no different from the world we live in. Don't let that be said of us.
- We are being watched – people want us to fail – not because they're nasty, really, but because they want to believe that Christ doesn't make a difference in a life in this crazy world. We need to prove otherwise and that's why I began my scripture reading for today with the last verse I read two weeks ago, *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* 1 Peter 2:12. You see, lives are at stake. The prayer song that I sing as I sit down to every sermon prep has this for verse one:

*Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your Holy Word.
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us
All Your purposes for Your glory.*

- We aren't putting on a show with how we live, we are glorifying God. So it's important that we have such a beautiful life that others desire it and then emulate it. Peter gives us a few pointers here to show us how people will see Jesus when they look at us. He spends a good bit of time here on . . .

How we live and relate to authority and our peers is a witness to Jesus.

- Many of us went to the polls over the past few weeks, most did on election day this past Tuesday – some, like Kathy and I, took care of it with early voting because we were going to be away on Tuesday, November 7. I was surprised in a city of almost 20,500 people that only about 4,500 people voted in the mayoral election. I

tried to find how many registered voters we have in Ashland City but couldn't find that info, but I thought there should have been more. As good citizens we have the opportunity to bring our biblical views with us to the voting booth – it's a good thing to not miss that opportunity. What kind of citizen are you? Peter tells us that we are to be good and useful citizens. Observing the laws and exercising our voting privileges is a good way to do that.

- Do you pray for our leaders? Even when they have little integrity and strength of character they need prayer. In fact, it's even more so when our leaders exhibit little or no morality – they NEED our prayer – desperately. From 2009 until 2017 we had an administration in Washington that pushed for and enacted legislation that was often contrary to what God's word teaches. Since January we have had a president who is a lightning rod for criticism both deserved and undeserved. We have seen activity from our senators and representatives that show they have allowed their power to go to their heads and the mighty have fallen. We can wring our hands and weep or we can get down to business and pray all the more for all of them. They are not only our leaders, and by virtue of that, our servants, but they are also God's servants. That's what Peter tells us here in verses 13-16. And if you think he's irrelevant because he was living in a different time, you're wrong. Yes, he lived over two thousand years ago, but he lived in an even more dangerous culture. How bad was it? Well, he was writing this letter when Nero was emperor in Rome. He was the guy who, who because he needed to divert attention from his horrific leadership and policies found a handy scapegoat in the young church and many, many Christ Followers lost their lives in the terrible persecution that followed. Peter still admonishes his readers, then and now, to honor the king no matter how bad that king is and no matter what politics he espouses.
- And how do you handle authority when you get stopped on the road by police officer? That officer deserves your respect. Yes, you might be able to get off on a technicality – there are things you can do, there is much you can find on the subject online, but the question remains – did you do the “crime”? Even if you didn't do the crime, you need to represent your Lord by honoring that officer.
- The truth is, Peter says we are to honor all as if they are a king. How would you behave if you came in contact with a king? R-E-S-P-E-C-T. People crave respect – it's very appropriate to satisfy that craving for people – many a soul has come into the kingdom because they experienced love and respect for the first time from a Christ Follower.
- Peter goes on to say that we should live as free people because, though we are citizens of an earthly kingdom, we are, first and foremost, citizens of the Kingdom of God. And with that higher citizenship, he tells us that we must practice the freedom we have in Christ – but we are to NEVER abuse the privilege. Barclay says there is no doctrine so easy to pervert as Christian freedom, and writes, “*Christian freedom is always conditioned by Christian responsibility. Christian responsibility is always conditioned by Christian love. Christian love is the reflection of God's love. And, therefore, Christian liberty can rightly be summed up in Augustine's memorable phrase: "Love God, and do what you like."* He goes on to say, “*The Christian is free because he is the slave of God. Christian freedom does not mean being free to do as we like; it means being free to do as we ought.*” In a similar vein, commentator David Wheaton writes, “*Christian freedom is to do as HE wishes and not the license to do as one pleases, indulging sinful lusts under the pretext of “permissiveness.”* That means to be free is not anarchy. Christians are not above the law – they should be the best followers of that which does not conflict with what the Bible teaches.
- Honor all persons, honor one another, fear God, and honor those in earthly authority and anyone observing you will at least be curious – they will see something in you they may want to investigate – and maybe even welcome into their own heart. Then . . .

Peter goes on to the subject of slaves

- The Roman Empire was home to some 60 million slaves – yes, that is 60 with six zeros after it. Like American culture where we have decided that we don't want to do manual labor and so immigrants are more than happy to come in and do it for us at a much lower wage, the Romans felt they didn't have to work at all. In Roman society a slave was not a person but a thing to be used as his/her owner pleased. Slave owners literally had the power of life or death over their slaves. Peter tells the slaves who would have read this letter that they are actually free in Jesus Christ but they are to continue on in their role. History records many slaves who were

leaders in the Church – some were even the leader of the gathering in which their owner participated. There were bishops in the early Church who were slaves. Peter says be slaves but be Christ Followers as you serve your earthly master. He doesn't address the "rightness" or "wrongness" of slavery; and neither did Paul in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3 (Ephesians 6:9 and Colossians 3:22) where he famously addressed the subject of relationships. Instead both apostles insist that no matter what a person's station in life is, they are to be faithful and diligent. Peter tells them here to do the best they can because all we do is as unto Christ.

- You know what the modern equivalent is here? It is our work as an employee. Who do your employers and workmates see when they see you working? Yes, they see you, yes, but by your testimony, they are seeing Jesus too. What are they seeing? Is it a good witness?
- People are watching – are they seeing Jesus? You see . . .

We represent the God of the Universe – we ultimately answer to him – are others seeing him?

- Peter goes on to show who is REALLY in charge of everything, no matter who our king is. He points out that our God is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Even as Peter was telling his readers to serve their earthly leaders to the best of their ability, and as he recounted his first-hand witness of how Jesus gave no resistance to his abuse as he went to the Cross, he also had in mind Jesus's words that are recorded in Matthew and Luke, *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* Matthew 10:28. Ultimately our service and allegiance is to God. Are we submitting to him? You see, one who is not submitting to God will not be the kind of representative Jesus Christ needs. People are watching.

CONCLUSION: Are we good citizens? Are we serving in a way that represents Jesus? Are we presenting to the world a picture of God as a loving shepherd and caretaker rather than a nasty, vindictive rules machine? We are being watched. Ask this question of yourself: Who do they see, when they're looking at me? Amen.