

Ashland Brethren in Christ, March 25, 2018

Lori Lower

How Do We See Jesus? (Deuteronomy 10:12-21, Matthew 25:34-45)

This week we are finishing the Lenten series, Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord. Over the last few weeks, Pastor Keith has given us insight in to how Jesus meets us and SEES us - in unexpected places, with the woman at the well in Samaria; in unexpected invitations – when Philip tells Nathanael to come and see for yourself; from heartbreak to heartburn- when Jesus appeared to the men on the road to Emmaus; and last week, how Jesus meets us in our everyday lives - when Jesus calls Matthew, the tax collector, to be his disciple and the questions are asked, “Why him?, Why me?, and more importantly Why not?” In all of these messages, we’ve learned how God, Jesus, sees US and KNOWS us – you and me, and through this, we can learn about HIM. And then, in the “light of His glory” from the song, how we’re to go to people around us, shining God’s glory through our lives and invite them to follow Jesus.

Today, we’re going to turn things around just a *little* bit. We’re going to learn about how WE can see Jesus – and how Jesus is visible if our eyes are open to see Him.

First we’ll discover how and when we see Jesus in others around us, and not just in other Christ followers, although that is important. And then through what I’m calling a back door approach to Palm Sunday and Passion Week, we’ll examine how we may see Jesus as King and as Savior and how these observations should impact how we live our lives as Christ followers.

I appreciated the musical selections that Ron chose for today’s service, they set the stage as we look at the last week of Jesus’ human life on earth. Our Scripture passage is recorded in the book of Matthew as part of a larger discourse that Jesus gave on the Mount of Olives, where he talks about the future, the future of Jerusalem, as well as His future. It appears that this is part of His teachings between the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his eventual betrayal, trial and crucifixion. The other three Gospels, Mark, Luke and John, do not include this particular story, but have some other messages of Jesus, all of which may have happened in the same timeframe. There are two other parables in this section of Matthew, [parables are short stories that illustrate moral attitudes or in the case of Jesus, religious principles]. One is about the 10 bridesmaids and the other about money a master entrusted to three of his servants. In these parables, Jesus is talking about what it means to be ready for His return and what we should be doing while we are waiting. Our story today, which is sometimes described as the parable of acts of mercy, is included in a passage about the final judgment.

Let’s turn in our Bibles to Matthew 25:34-45. I’m reading from the New Living Translation. In this passage, we’ll find that Jesus rather bluntly tells us, how (or when) we should SEE him.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you

gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. ³⁶ I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'

³⁷ "Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing?'³⁹ When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

⁴⁰ "And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters,^[a] you were doing it to me!'

⁴¹ "Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons.'^[b] ⁴² For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me a drink. ⁴³ I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn't give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

⁴⁴ "Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?'

⁴⁵ "And he will answer, 'I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.'

How many of you enjoy looking at optical illusions? You know – pictures which, if you look at it one way you see a certain image, but if you look at it another way, you see something different. I'm going to show you some optical illusions that you may be familiar with. For instance, take a look at this....

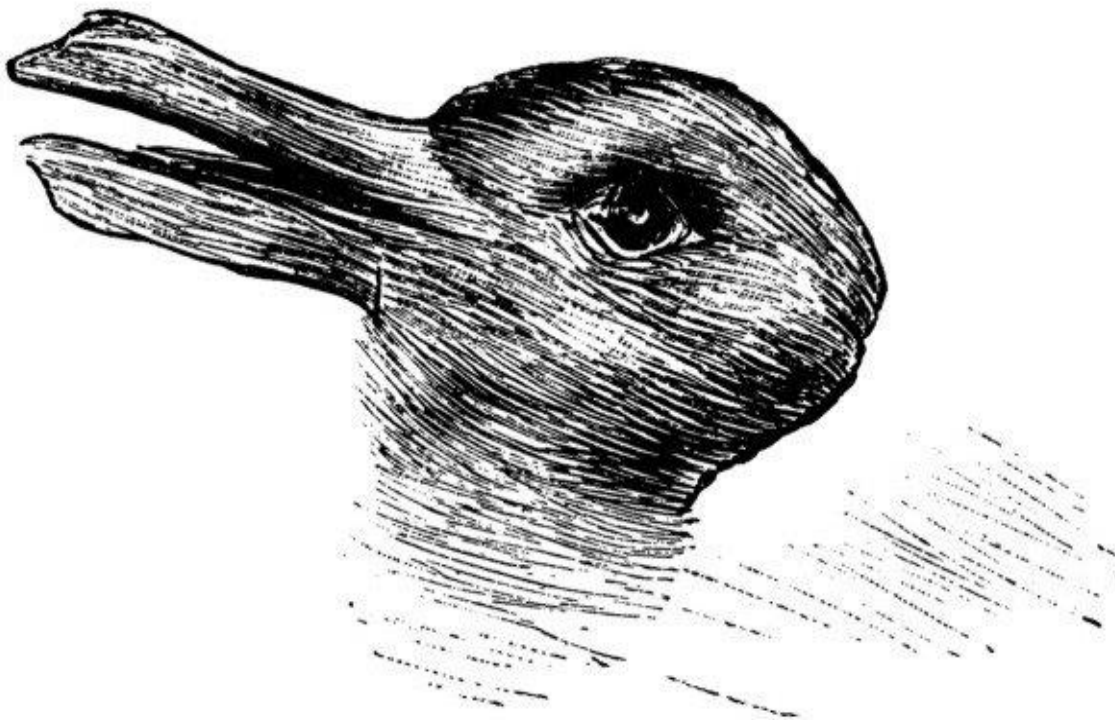
What do you see?



What do you see? What about this one?



If you're having trouble, maybe this one will help – it tells you what to look for!



Do you see a duck or a rabbit?

I tried to find a good one with the face of Jesus, but google only brought up some that looked really creepy.

In looking at an optical illusion, sometimes you have to focus on a different part of the picture before you can see the other image. You may have to close one eye or the other, or maybe squint, or move closer or farther away from it. In other words, you have to change YOUR PERSPECTIVE.

In some ways in this passage, I think that Jesus is asking those around him, his disciples, and others listening in, and us, his followers today, to change our perspective.

What do you see when you look into the eyes of the guy who cut you off in the grocery line, or the office colleague who took credit for your hard work, or the unwashed homeless person you passed on the sidewalk? Do you see these people as someone to pity, to tolerate, or get angry with? Or do you see the face of Christ? If we're honest, most of us would have to admit that seeing Christ in some of the people we encounter in the course of a day is very challenging, and yet that is what we are called to do.

When I still worked at the seminary, I felt like I needed to get out into the community more – to get out of the isolated cocoon of being with other believers. Then when I “retired” and before I got the opportunity for the pastoral internship here, and then working part-time at globalLead, I felt that tug even more. So I decided to volunteer at the Associated Charities’ Food bank. It is an opportunity for me, in a small way, to assist people in their time of need. All I do is basically guide them around the room as if they were in a grocery store, and help them pick out things that are marked on their needs list. Sometimes I hear their stories, and some of them would rip your heart out. As volunteers, we are trained not to ask prying questions, so most of the time I’m doing my best just to smile, acknowledge their comments, and maybe try to insert a little humor to make what can be an embarrassing time for them more pleasant. I’m thankful that there are places like this in the community where people can go for assistance. But it gives me, and the other volunteers, the experience of getting to see Jesus in the faces of those we serve.

Where in your life can you see Jesus in the face of others? Do we look at these opportunities as ways to serve Jesus and follow His command – which he repeats time and time again in the New Testament? These are not “if you feel like it” suggestions – it’s a to-do list. Love your neighbor as yourself? Give a cup of cold water in my name?

As a side note, I don’t think it’s an accident that these verses are placed in the context of Jesus’ teaching on the final judgment – not that our faith and salvation is based on works, but that, in the words of the song, “they will know we are Christians by our love.” Or are we, what I call “Crankshaft Christians” – the cartoon character who is crotchety and constantly grumbling about being irritated or inconvenienced by those around him.

But here’s another shift in perspective - do we see *ourselves* in the eyes or faces of others? Can we identify with those who are hungry, sick, homeless – in body and in spirit? The reality is that each one of us is in need

of grace and care. When we begin to see ourselves as the actual person in need of love, and mercy, then a transformation begins to happen in our lives. The great motivator to respond to these sayings of Jesus should come out of overwhelming gratitude that comes from being seen and known by Jesus, which has been part of the theme of this sermon series. I sometimes pray “help me to see others as Jesus sees them.” But based on what I just said, I’m thinking I need to change my perspective and prayer to “help me to see others as Jesus sees me?” “Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.” “Open the eyes of OUR hearts, Lord.”

Now let’s look at two other ways we might see Jesus; through the events that bookend today’s Scripture passage. Just as Jesus turned things around in that looking at others, we can see Him, here is another example of His upside-down kingdom.

[Do we see Jesus as Mighty King?]

Let’s look at Matthew chapter 21, verses 1-11.

As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. ²“Go into the village over there,” he said. “As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will immediately let you take them.”

⁴This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said,

⁵“Tell the people of Jerusalem,^[a]
 ‘Look, your King is coming to you.
 He is humble, riding on a donkey—
 riding on a donkey’s colt.’”^[b]

⁶The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it.^[c]

⁸Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,

“Praise God^[d] for the Son of David!
 Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD!
 Praise God in highest heaven!”^[e]

¹⁰The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. “Who is this?” they asked.

¹¹And the crowds replied, “It’s Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

This is the record of Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, which we now call Palm Sunday. This event was prophesied in Isaiah 62 and Zechariah 9.

It is interesting to note that here He doesn't tell His disciples and followers to be quiet about him, but to shout his praises. He was openly declaring to the people that He was their King and the Messiah that they had been waiting for.

However, because of the geo-political atmosphere of the region, many of the Jews were looking for someone to "save" them from the Roman Empire and they thought that Jesus would overthrow Rome and deliver them from Rome's oppressive rule. So wouldn't you have thought it odd that a king would ride into Jerusalem on a humble donkey rather than a white steed?

But they failed to realize that Jesus' kingdom was a spiritual kingdom and when Jesus did not do as they expected, they quickly turned on Him.

Jesus as Savior

However, Jesus came not to conquer by force as an earthly king, but by love, grace, mercy, and His own sacrifice for His people. His kingdom is not a kingdom of armies and royal splendor, but of humble servanthood. He didn't come to conquer nations, but hearts and minds. Jesus gave his life on the cross FOR US.

Isaiah 53

¹⁰ **But it was the Lord's good plan to crush him
and cause him grief.**

**Yet when his life is made an offering for sin,
he will have many descendants.**

**He will enjoy a long life,
and the Lord's good plan will prosper in his hands.**

¹¹ **When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish,
he will be satisfied.**

**And because of his experience,
my righteous servant will make it possible
for many to be counted righteous,
for he will bear all their sins.**

Do you see Jesus as ...

The mighty King? Can you relate to the Jews of the time – wanting Him to swoop in and save you from a life of misery? Or do you see Him as the King and Lord of Creation, King of your life, worthy of our praise and adoration?

The Savior of the world? When you see Jesus on the cross – are you disappointed that he was put to death like a sheep to slaughter? Like the disciples who didn't seem to understand or even remember what he said about his coming death and resurrection? Or do you see Him as a loving Savior, willingly giving up His life for us – to bring us redemption and to put us into a right relationship with God, the Father?

In Others? Do you see Jesus when you look into the eyes of the needy, both physically and spiritually? Like Mother Theresa, can we say “Every person is Christ for me, and since there is only one Jesus, that person is the one person in the world at that moment. I see Christ in every person I touch, it is as simple as that.”? Or do you look away and ignore them, convinced that someone else will take care of their needs?

Let me suggest that we see Him as all of these, in proper perspective: Jesus, Son of the Father, King of kings and Lord of lords, who loved us so much that he gave up His life so that we will should not perish (John 3:16). Perish – as in spending eternity apart from God; that he came to save us and cleanse us from our sin. And because of His great love for us, we see Him in the eyes of those around us, and serve those in need, as if we were indeed serving Jesus himself. People, this is no optical illusion. Shouldn't this be the testimony of our lives? – Because of what Jesus did for us, shouldn't we be willing to love and serve in His name?

I think this is a good time to remind us of our church's motto, – Heart, Hands and Feet of Jesus. As we as a church body have been praying for God's vision for ABC, and seeking his face, is it maybe in some aspect of service, into which He's calling us?

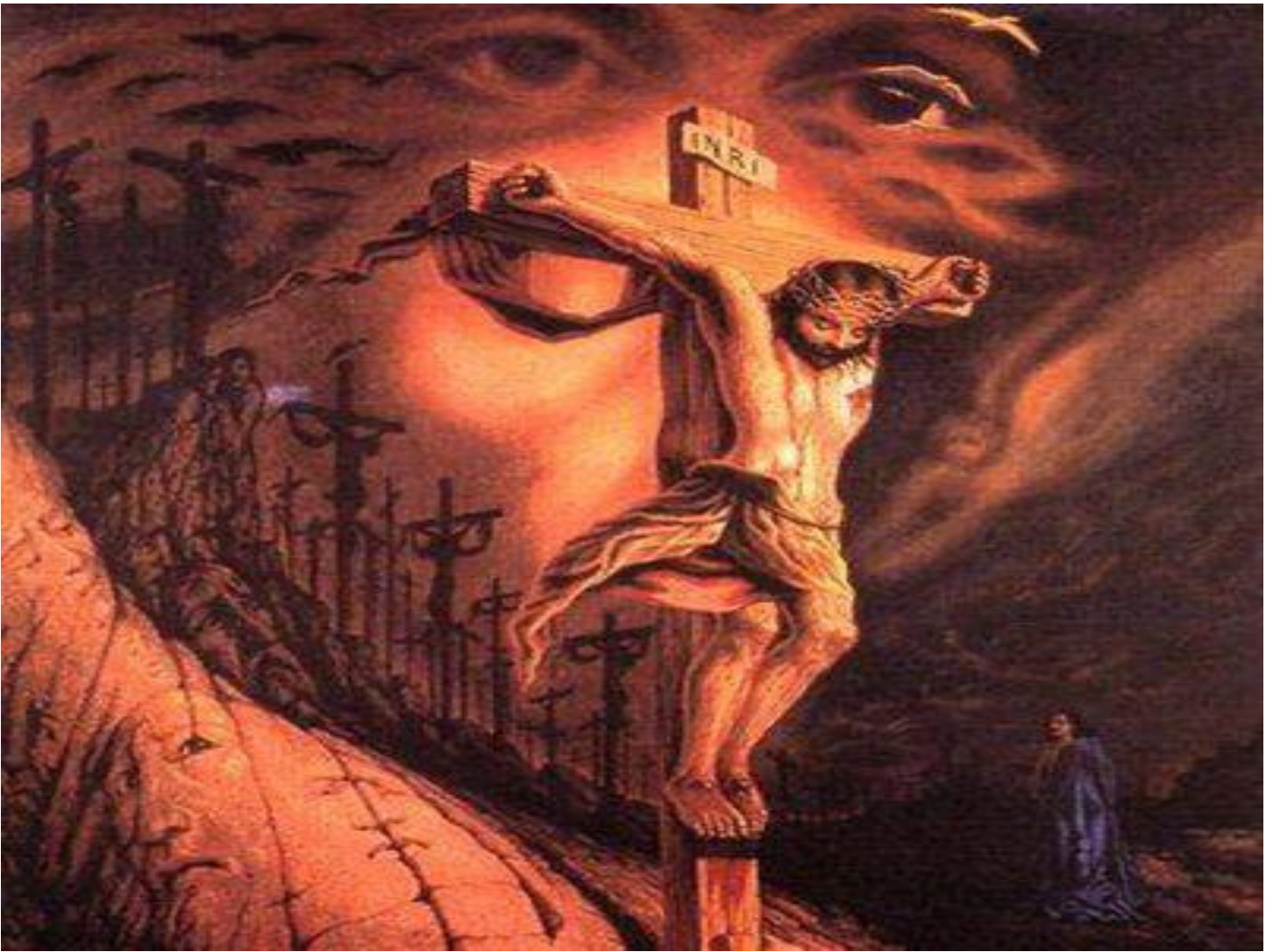
In closing I'd like to share one of the songs that I've been hearing recently on the radio, which has a message that has been speaking to my heart. The song is “Build My Life” by Passion. (I would have played it for you, but it's one of those 7 minute worship songs that some of you may not appreciate!) So I'll just read a part of the lyrics for you. I think it is the perfect synopsis of our series, Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.

Holy, there is no one like You
 There is none beside You
 Open up my eyes in wonder
 Show me who You are
 And fill me with Your heart
 And lead me in Your love to those around me

Worthy of every song we could ever sing
 Worthy of all the praise we could ever bring
 Worthy of every breath we could ever breathe
 We live for You

Let us see Jesus and live our lives for Him.

Pray



BENEDICTION –

Remember that the prayer corner is always open after the service.

From Micah 6:8

This is what God asks of you, only this... To act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.