

# **Sermon For Sunday, January 15, 2017 - “Seeing and Being Seen”**

Second Sunday After Epiphany  
January 15, 2017  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

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## **Seeing and Being Seen**

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Some pretty big things happen in this story and they all involve looking, seeing, noticing, paying attention.

- Twice John sees Jesus and tells his disciples to look.
- They pay attention and start following Jesus.
- Jesus says, “What are you looking for, what are you seeking?” and “come and see.”
- One of them, Andrew, brings his brother Simon to see Jesus. Jesus looks at him and gives him a new name - Cephas, Peter, which means The Rock.

Imagine for a moment what would have happened if John hadn’t noticed Jesus walking toward them; or, if he hadn’t pointed Jesus out because he didn’t want to share the spotlight with Jesus. What if his disciples had dismissed John’s story about Jesus as crazy talk; or Andrew thought he had too many important things to do and couldn’t take the time to go get his brother and bring him to see Jesus. John wouldn’t have fulfilled his life’s purpose of pointing people to Jesus. Andrew and Simon would have missed out on seeing, being seen by Jesus, and finding their place with him.

Seeing, noticing and paying attention matters. I sometimes wonder - if Jesus came walking toward me today would I just pass him by with my mind racing through my to-do list, my focus on my cell phone or the icy sidewalks? I’m guessing there was something about Jesus that was hard to miss, probably something in his eyes. But then I think about how I can go for days without making eye contact with loved ones much less a total stranger. And actually, the risen Jesus is still walking around among us today in his body the church, in all of us. Yet, so often we miss him; we fail to notice. Paying attention matters.

When was the last time someone really took notice of you? When was the last time someone looked you in the eyes and gave you their full, undivided attention for a long time - without interrupting you or changing the subject, without multitasking, without being distracted by a device? When was the last time you did that for someone else, especially for someone of another ethnic or religious background, sexual orientation or gender identity, or someone who thinks very differently than you do? Powerful things can happen when we look, when we see, when we notice each other. We can see Jesus in one another. Yet, so often we miss out. We pass by Jesus.

Martin Luther taught that we miss seeing Jesus in others because we're so curved in on ourselves - some describe it as navel-gazing. Of course, most of us don't actually gaze at our belly buttons much; but we do spend a lot of time looking down at our calendars, our to-do lists, our computers and phones, our bank statements - curved in on ourselves. We get so focused on our own plans and worries. Given this, sometimes we're relieved that other people don't take too close a look at us because we're not so proud of what they'd see. We don't want all our brokenness and neuroses to be on full display. Other times, we don't want people to notice us because they might ask for more than we're willing to give. It can be uncomfortable to have people pay attention to us.

I'm guessing it wasn't comfortable for Simon when Jesus looked deeply at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas, Peter." Simon had just met Jesus and already Jesus knew all about him - his name, his father's name. That must have been unnerving. And before they'd even exchanged pleasantries, already Jesus was saying you are to be called Cephas, Peter, which means Rock. If I were Peter I'd be thinking, "Wait a minute, slow down. Shouldn't we at least talk about the weather before you bring me into your inner circle of friends and expect things of me?"

But there was something about Jesus and, I'm guessing, something about Jesus' eyes. I bet when Simon looked into Jesus' eyes wondering if this guy is for real, he saw that Jesus knew him through and through - insecurities, hang-ups, issues, sin and all. Simon saw that Jesus knew him fully but loved him even more fully. Jesus gazed at Simon and gave him a new name, an identity, and a role to play in God's story. He was not just some screw-up; he was Peter, the rock. Peter didn't always handle this with ease; sometimes the Rock was more like a stumbling block and Jesus called him as much. But, even after Peter had denied him three times, Jesus continued to gaze at him with love and entrusted Peter to feed his sheep.

Jesus looks closely at each of us, too. Every time we gather in worship, hear his Word, share in his body and blood, or serve those in need, we meet Jesus and he takes a good long look at us. When Jesus looks at us he knows us fully and he loves us even more fully. Jesus calls us by a new name, our true name - beloved of God. In his eyes, in God's eyes, we are not defined by all the brokenness within or all that we accomplish. In God's eyes, we are defined by the name we are given at baptism - beloved of God. In baptism, Jesus gives us a new name, a new identity, and a new role to play in God's story. And each time we meet Jesus and are called by our new name, we are set free from being curved in on ourselves. We are set free to see and pay attention to others, to look at them with love and kindness, to see Jesus in them.

What a difference it would make in our world this week if we would seek to look at each person we meet with the eyes of love; if we would seek to see people not as a label or a race or a political party, but as beloved of God; if we would seek to see and welcome Jesus in them. What a difference it would make if we looked up from our self-centered pursuits and paid close attention to the pain, the struggles, the hopes and fears of others. This would help us to do what Jesus called Peter and each of us to do - to feed and care for his sheep, to feed and care for God's people.

We can trust that God is looking on us all with a long, loving look and that God is at work to lift up our eyes so that we might see and that we might show love.

Let's take a few moments to pray for that.

Amen.

