

“LOOKING AT THE HEART”

Proper 6B June 14, 2009

1 Samuel 15:3-16:13 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

Introduction:

There are five key life-changing Insights into Godly living in the section of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians we heard read this morning. Try to keep these in mind as I challenge you with the call to action today. The five insights from 2 Corinthians 5:6-17 are these:

1. Verse 7: We are to walk by faith, not by sight.
2. Verse 9: While we are here on Earth we should make it our goal to please the Lord.
3. Verse 11: Knowing what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others also to believe.
4. Verse 14: For the Love of Christ urges us on, or compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all,
5. Verse 17: Therefore, If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation.

Having listed them, I’ll now

Expound On The Five Insights:

1. We are to walk by faith, not by sight. What we see with our eyes is not always the reality within which God is

operating. God's ways are not our ways. Isaiah 55:8-9, states it this way: ⁸*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.* ⁹*"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

The insight is, God is superior to us, even though that is difficult for us to accept. Therefore, we are required to walk by faith, not by sight. When God sends us on a mission, or calls us to act a certain way, or to pray for a specific end, we are to – as Nike says – just do it. We don't have the perspective, or the frame of reference to judge what God is doing. We need to trust God, which is an act of faith. To learn that lesson puts us ahead of a great number of people. Our second insight is

2. We make it our goal, or our aim, to please the Lord. There are many voices in our lives calling us to please them. There are spouses, parents, bosses, siblings, friends, our conscience, and the Holy Spirit.

Even though we don't always understand exactly what God is doing, or asking us to do, we should always trust God above all other voices, and endeavor to please him. We can't do this unless we believe God is good, and is always *"working all things together for our good*

because we love God, and we are called according to his purpose – not our own” (Romans 8:28).

We live by faith, and our goal is to please the Lord. Our third insight is

3. Knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others also to believe. It is God’s desire to save human souls from eternal damnation. If that weren’t so then God the Father would not have allowed Jesus, God the Son, to come into this difficult life and suffer a horrible death.

If God didn’t love all humans then Christ’s death would have been an exercise in futile cruelty. Now God has called us into a partnership of trying to save souls. It’s a serious business; as serious as Jesus’ death by crucifixion. Therefore, we do every thing we can to try and persuade others to give God a serious chance in their lives. Our motivation is love: we want them to avoid hell, and enjoy the benefit of heaven.

We live by faith, our goal is to please the Lord, we try to persuade others to believe, and our fourth insight is

4. For the Love of Christ urges us on – or compels us. What God is asking us to do on behalf of other people – some whom we simply don’t like - would not be possible except we have been touched and changed by the personal love of Jesus Christ. Now that we have

experienced such powerful love for ourselves, we are willing to try and love others. Because we have been loved and forgiven, we dare risk loving and forgiving others. And the motivation is not what we get out of it, because we have already received the promise of our reward. Our motivation is God's love for others living within us, and motivating us on their behalf.

We live by faith, our goal is to please the Lord, we try to persuade others to believe, we are motivated by love, and our fifth insight into obedient Godly living is

5. If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation.

This is the payoff. Jesus came into our lives and changed us; now we know it is possible for Jesus to change even the most despicable person we encounter. It is a miracle that only God, the Creator, can accomplish – and God is giving us the privilege to be partners in this life-changing ministry. Therefore, we don't give up with weariness. Each day we receive fresh strength to keep pressing forward. The fields are white for the harvest, and we are the laborers in our field. We are the bridge builders God is using to build bridges from our lives into the lives of others, and to God. We are motivated because we believe every soul is worthy of having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

With these thoughts from St. Paul in mind, let's review the events recounted in

Our Lesson From 1 Samuel:

God had decided to reject Saul as the king of Israel. Though Saul has all the physical and personality characteristics that one might look for in a leader, Saul is deficit at the core of his being. To borrow a phrase later used for David and place it out of context, Saul is not a "man after God's heart."

Therefore, God sends the prophet Samuel on a journey to anoint the one who will become the new King of Israel. Under God's instructions, Samuel journeys to Bethlehem to find a man named Jesse. Jesse has eight sons, and one of them is going to be the new King.

Samuel has Jesse parade his sons before him so he can look at them, and give God an opportunity to confirm in his heart and mind which is to be anointed as the future king.

Seven sons are present that day, and each one in turn is brought before the Prophet. To his eye, and with his human way of looking at things, Samuel is making his own choices which ones would be worthy of becoming the new king. Only God doesn't confirm any of Samuel's decisions. Remember, God says that his ways are not our

ways; his thoughts are not our thoughts; for his thoughts are higher than ours.

God speaks to Samuel's heart and mind with these words: *"For the Lord does not see as mortals see. They look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the Heart."* That is the crux of the matter. You and I have difficulty seeing into a person's heart.

Samuel is perplexed. He has viewed every son Jesse brought before him, and God has not chosen any of them. So Samuel asks Jesse if he has any more sons. Jesse responds: "Well, I do have one more; my youngest son. He is in the hills with the sheep. He is a musician, a poet, a dreamer. He is immature, and you certainly would not be interested in him after seeing these fine, mature, physically imposing, strong, brave, warriors I have already shown you. Would you?"

'Bring him down to me. We will not sit down until he arrives', says Samuel. Finally, David arrives. Samuel looks at the young, handsome, tanned face of David, the shepherd. The Spirit of God moves in Samuel confirming that David is to be the new King of Israel. Samuel anoints him with oil, and the *"the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward."*

"For the Lord does not see as mortals see."

They look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the Heart.”

What Are The Implications For Us Knowing That God Looks On The Heart?

First, We are not as smart as we think we are. It is so easy to quickly make judgments about people based on outward appearances. Someone lives in a large, beautiful house – we automatically think their life is great, and, Oh, how we would like to trade places with them. A couple seems to be happy with each other, and we assume their life is just great with each other; they have no problems; and Oh, how we would like to trade places with them.

The truth is: because we can only look on the outward appearances, we have no real clue to the struggles most people go through in any typical day. But, God looks deep. God sees what is going on in each person’s heart; in their deepest thoughts and motivations; in how pure is their love for their spouse, or their family, or their job, or their church, or for God.

The couple who led The Marriage Retreat that Shannon and I were at the past week, live in very large, very beautiful house, in a very beautiful, gated, golf-

course neighborhood. Materially, they are blessed. They love the Lord, are in active ministry helping couples achieve a better marriage, and have made their house part of their ministry. All of that is observable by outward appearances. It is only in getting to know them that you realize they both have serious medical problems that severely hinder their lives.

He had a major heart attack three years ago, in part from the constant stress of the ministries he was part of, and because he was not taking care of his body. Last year he had a second surgery to place more stents in arteries leading to his heart. Now, he is in the gym at 5:00 AM six mornings per week doing the exercise he should have been doing many years ago. A few years ago his wife – and partner in their marriage ministry – had surgery for an abdominal issue. Something went wrong during the surgery and a nerve was damaged. This nerve leads into the tailbone and is so constantly inflamed that she can no longer sit on a chair without experiencing a high degree of pain. This means that she cannot fly on airplanes to visit her grandchildren, sit for more than a few minutes in a chair, go to a movie, or just sit down to read a book. It has totally altered her life and greatly restricted her ability to participate in their marriage counseling ministry.

From the outside their life looks perfect – but God knows better, because God looks deeper, even at their hearts and the true meaning of their lives.

The Second Implication is: We tend to look through people, not at them.

The more secular our culture becomes the less we value individual people. When our culture was more God-oriented we were more aware of the value of each individual person. That became a hall-mark of western civilization. That value of the individual came directly from the knowledge that Jesus died for EACH person, individually. He died for the sins of the entire world, but only after collecting all the individual sins of every human being who would ever live on Earth; and he died with each individual's name in his mind. I believe that!

God saves us one person at a time, not one race at a time, or country at a time. The worth of our individual citizens shaped our world-view and style of government. It meant each person should have an equal vote in elections; each person should have a shot at learning to read, and write, and do basic math. Each person should have equal opportunity to pursue life, liberty, and happiness.

As we move away from God, we are losing the

value of the one. We use to value people and use things. Now, increasingly, we are valuing things and using people. We tend to look through people we encounter as if they weren't really there. They are like Virgil in Dante's *Inferno* who is not a flesh and blood person, but is a "shade", more shadow than earthly.

The extreme of looking on the outward appearance of people is to see what they wear, what they drive, where they live, what their job is to a greater degree than how good of a human being they are. This is not God's way. God looks on the heart. Jesus really looked at the lame, the lost, the blind, and the diseased. He didn't throw money at them to ease his conscience; he stopped, talked with them, prayed for them, and left them changed human beings. God looks at the heart.

The Third Implication is: God places people in our midst with talents we are overlooking. Because we tend to look at the outward things we overlook people whom God has gifted with the very talents, interests, and time the church needs to accomplish the mission God has given us. Holy Cross Church is supposed to be building bridges between people, and to God. What does that mean; what might that look like?

Acts 10:34 says: *"God is no respecter of*

persons". God doesn't show partiality or favoritism. King Saul was physically everything the text-book designer of a king could have created. He was tall. He was handsome. He loved his children. He was brave in battle. He had a commanding presence. People were willing to follow him. All of that was good – for the text-book. But God, looking at his heart, knew Saul was critically flawed. God saw beyond all the outward appearance and the temporal fluff. Saul lacked a critical element: unyielding faith in God. He was not a man after God's own heart. And, he had to be replaced.

God chose one whom Samuel could not pick out of a crowd. He was handsome, but he didn't look like a leader, yet he was a Godly leader, and through him God was able to firmly establish the nation Israel under the leadership of God Almighty.

There are people here serving faithfully each week that a visitor would not pick out as looking like one of the important pieces of this ministry. Yet, God knows their hearts, has equipped them to serve faithfully, and has sent them to us as a gift from God. God requires that we look deeper than the skin in order to see the redeemed soul, serving under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

We've adopted a guiding value by which our

ministry will be run. It is this: *At Holy Cross every soul is worthy of having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.* That means we have to look beyond the obvious physical attributes, or lack of them, and see the heart of the person. Will this be easy? Seldom! Will it be worthwhile? Always!

The Fourth, and final implication, is we are enriched when we look beyond the flesh and see into the soul.

Look who is serving today? Begin with me, a broken-down recycled Priest. Look who else is serving this morning (Name each person in ministry). Look at what God is already doing with the people who are here. As we learn to open our arms, our hearts, and our ministry to others whom God leads here, think what else God can accomplish through us.

Holy Cross could easily be dead, sold-off, and forgotten, but that is not God's will for us. I am, therefore, excited about what God is doing, will soon be doing, and will long-term do through us. How about you? It begins with training ourselves to look at the heart. Will you commit to prayerfully learning how to do that?