

“How does God see that person over there?”

When I was in my teens, a period of general anxiety about how you look, I was acutely aware of my ears. Even mentioning it now makes me feel self-conscious. I had, in my opinion, big ears. Thankfully this was the period in which it suddenly became cool for guys to have long, ear-concealing hair. Years later someone, seeing a photo of my mother, said, “Oh, that’s where that nose of yours comes from!”

When you look in a mirror, what do you see? You see your face front on. But you hardly see that because you are looking for imperfections, marks, things that need adjusting. We are harsh self-critics. When you *face* the world you want this face to look good. You want to put *a good face* on things when you *face up* to the situations of the day. Beware of bad photos on *Face Book*.

It is easy to extend this to your body in general. And in a way, that is what is happening in the story of Samuel and his search for the perfect King for God’s people. He looks at a parade of candidates. First comes Arnold Schwarzenegger. Perfect! Big, intimidating, a natural warrior king! But God says “No...” Then we have Bruce Willis walk by. Burly, friendly but with a ruthless streak in him. A manipulator of men, excellent! But God says “No...” Then Sylvester Stallone. Samuel’s eyes brighten but he suspects the worst and again God says “No...” eventually they bring Johnny Depp by. He’s a bit weedy, very pretty and hard to read. God says “That’s my boy!” Edward Scissor Hands for King of Israel? Well it wouldn’t be my choice... But the point of the story is not about any sort of excellence that is physically noticeable. Nor is it about moral faultlessness. David was hopelessly self-centred and a show-off. But when you read the whole story of this faulted man you begin to see the humility and honesty alongside the willfulness. You begin to understand his close, personal dependence on God. You see his undefended humanity. Maybe that is what God saw.

When you look in a mirror, what do you see?

Sometimes you see a face through a steamed up mirror, or a face in dim light. If you really want to see your face, honestly, you need to wipe the glass and turn on all the lights. Ouch! Really! My skin looks like that!! There is a lot to be said for not looking at your self too closely. It is better not to notice the blemishes, the loss of what you once had, the imperfections that seem intent on colonizing every corner with an army of wrinkles. I don’t want to *face up* that writing this sermon reveals both vanity and anxiety in horrifying quantity.

Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light...in all that is good and right and true. Wake up! This is St Paul standing behind you in the bathroom. But he is not talking about your face.

Psalm 147 says “The Lord does not delight in any man’s legs.” This is a great quote because it compels you to ask yourself, “Well, does God delight in shoulders? Or hair?” and conclude that these probably are not his focus either. What does God delight in in you? In that person over there? What brings delight to God’s heart?

John’s Gospel is all about how a man gets seen. They saw a man, blind from birth, begging.

1. He’s seen as a man, blind from birth.
2. Because bad things are punishments from God, in a fairly superstitious, folk-lore form of Judaism, his blindness is seen as a sign of wickedness in himself or his family. He is seen as a consequence of someone’s badness
3. The disciples see him as a “case-in-point” study for Jesus to teach from.

4. Jesus sees him not as visually crippled, nor as divinely punished and sinful
Jesus sees him as a person who could shine with God's glory.

Jesus suddenly refers to a time of light when things must be done, and a time of darkness when nothing can be done. He is the light. Where and when he is present, you can see clearly and act well.

6. The Pharisees see him as a beggar, a fraud, a heretic and an enemy.

But the Pharisees don't even begin to look at him, just at themselves in the reflection of this man. Their lack of charity makes them beggars. Their willingness to lie in order to look good makes them frauds. Their manipulation of theology only to justify themselves makes them heretics. And their violent anger towards anyone who challenges them makes them enemies.

It is so dark in their world they cannot see beyond their own reflections.

When I turn into the light of Christ and I look at myself I see a little differently.
I see myself with my failings, my petty self-delusions of grandeur, my fears and the stories in which I star.
I see myself, and I hear Jesus chuckle, fondly, and I see him shake his head at my foolishness.
I see myself as someone trying to follow him. Trying to be like him in my peculiar world and culture.
I see myself not as a success, or as a failure.
I see myself as loved. Loved by God in Jesus.
I know myself forgiven by him, and that blows the cobwebs away.
I know myself empowered by him, and that gives me a confidence to try and to risk that I do not have alone. I can trust him to hold me together when I do not know how.
I see myself as not alone, but part of a functional family. Well, a kind-of-functional family called Church.

And then I can turn on the light of Christ and look at that person, over there.
I need to look past the legs(!), the age, the clothes.
Last year I learned this.....looking at the folks who live on the streets and survive by drop-in centres. I learned it by talking with them and making two friends.
To see how God sees I need to look inside and begin with the base line, which is, she or he is doing the best they can right now.
I need to remember that I cannot see how much they are carrying, or how much it hurts.
What are the worries, the guilts and the self-accusations they must bear? How heavy are the put-downs, the rejections, the failures?
And how strong is a spiritual body broken by a dysfunctional family upbringing, or perhaps struggling with a broken heart, or handicapped by damaged health or mental illness or addictions?
I cannot know, what God, who knows our inner self, knows.

That blind man on the road could be so easy to dismiss. But Jesus looks inside with the clear piercing light of love. He sees a man waiting to become a disciple. To be a light to the world.

There is an overwhelming optimism in the Light of Christ, a grandmotherly kindness, a forgiveness as deep as the sea, a strength of steel.

“How does God see that person over there?” That person is you, and God sees in you that image, that Holy Spirit imprint, in which we are all made. God sees in you the love He put there.

Love, that's how God see that person over there.