

First Christian Church
Sunday, October 12, 2014
Rev. Dr. Don Sarton

“I SEE!”

Scripture: Genesis 1: 1-3, 27, 31.
Matthew 9:9 (NRSB)

“I see!” That short phrase coming from mom, I soon learned meant the elaborately concocted story by my adolescent friends was not playing well in my home and I came to learn did not play well in other homes either. I grew up in North La Junta, an area of truck gardens, two small family dairy, gas station, three neighborhood grocery stores and a school. We had the run of a large area with county roads, open fields, trees to climb, and places for deep tunnels to be dug. But there were several places that were verboten. One was the irrigation canal bank. It was a sandy bank, but the sides were steep, the current swift, swirling water, and the gates where water was drawn out was strong and could suck the strongest swimmer under. The River, the Arkansas River divided North La Junta from La Junta proper. It was an inviting place to play, but it held its hidden dangers as well. The cow pens at the dairy, especially the pen of Prince the Bull; these were off limits as well.

On this particular summer afternoon another place came on the list. We discovered riding grain shovels down the steep shale slopes north of the canal was a great place to play. These same slopes offered great fun in the winter, sliding down on the soft snow. This venture proved to be a bit more exciting and dangerous. There were several scraped elbows, knees, along with torn jeans and tennis shoes. Our parents did not concur with our assessment of the fun.

I came to realize later in life, when I had children of my own, the fear and concern mom expressed was far more than the immediate danger of banged knees and elbows. She saw in our activity the future and the potential we held and the danger these activities held for that future.

When we say, “I SEE”, there are several dimensions to our vision. One is the external, the physical world with its beauty and limitations. The other is the internal, where we see the essence of a person, where we see who someone is all about.

These two dimensions of “Seeing” were made quite vivid for me, during my first pastorate, Burlington, CO. When I arrived there were some in the community who wondered at the sanity of a congregation who called as their pastor a bearded young man from California who drove a VW Bus. When I left, I suspect there were still some who were wondering the same thing. After I had been there for about two years I decided to cut my beard, now, not all of my beard mind you, in fact it has never been totally shaved since I first grew it in the fall of 1967. But, I

shaved most of the hair from my face with the exception of my mustache and sideburns. Not long after I had shaved I had an opportunity to go into one of the stores in town to visit with the owner, a Methodist about a project our two congregations Shared . The Methodist and Disciple Churches had a history of working together on the Migrant School held each summer. I was standing at the counter in chit chat before we got down to business and I could tell something was out of balance. This is a person who I had worked with before and had been into his store on more than one occasion, we had played golf together on the golf league. He stopped and said to me, I know that I should know you, but who are you? He knew the physical Don, but did not see beyond the physical.

Not long after that a member of the Christian Church and I were having lunch together after he had returned from a long harvest trip, he usually left in July and often did not return until early September, following the wheat harvest all the way to the Canadian border. It was during this time I had shaved off part of my beard. As we sat at the Wagon Wheel, he finally said, Ok Sarton what is it, there is something different about you, but I do not know what it is. This person knew the image of Don and was not limited by physical features.

It is this inner person that I want us to consider this morning. When God looks at you, what does God see? I learned a great deal about the struggles of the inner-person while at Boys Town. One of the things that was said time and time again during staffing, “how can we possibly help Jeff, Linda, Sarah, Jackson, Washington, fill in the blank, see the wonderful person they really are down deep, how can we motivate them to embrace that person and want to allow that person to thrive. In my opinion this is one mission of the Church. Enable others, individuals to see the wonderful, unique, special person God created them to be. To be able to claim their beauty that exists at the core of their being and nurture this essence.

This morning, I want us to focus on the text of scripture, one of the things that disturbs me about current Bible Study is that it often begins with the words, “What do you think the text means?” I think we should always begin by asking “What does the text say?” This particular text says: “Jesus Saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax table and said, come and follow me.” That is all? Nothing more, see and call. The text is clear, Jesus saw a man with a name, the text confirms that Jesus did not define this man by a profession. He did not put any boundaries around him, any limitations. I believe Jesus saw a man, a man (person) with hopes and dreams, pain and disappointments. Jesus saw the potential and was not bothered by the present, but called Matthew into a future.

I felt a bit of judgment in reading this text, how often have I seen and defined.

Tradition has said Matthew was the tax collector, the text does not confirm, could have been a farmer, fisherman, tradesman paying his taxes? But, we shall follow tradition. We know something about Matthew because we know something about Tax Collectors. They were

despised by the Jews and tolerated by the Romans. They were not socially included in either group, their only friends were other tax collectors and probably valued as fellow rejects and because of their wealth. They were considered unclean by the Jewish community in which they lived because they raised taxes for the Romans, and in most cases made their own wealth on the backs of their neighbors by adding to the tax their fee, which was basically what they could get away with. When a Rabbi was asked about a Tax Collector, his comment was, "You are not to push one into the ditch, but neither are you obligated to help one out." What did God see?

When we know that God sees us, we may respond with anxiety, fear and concern, just what does God see, does God see our limitations, the human foibles, the mistakes we have made, those may be seen and acknowledged, but what God sees is the person God created, the person whom received the breath of life. If we believe that God is Love, and we are created in the image of Love, then at the core of our being is LOVE! It is hard for us to see and to accept, but that is what is there and that is what Jesus saw in Matthew. He did not see the evil greedy person that many in the community saw. He did not see the outcast, the man rejected by the community spending much of his time alone. He saw a man named Matthew. We can think about this, God may see a woman named Nancy, A man named John, he sees, really sees and in the seeing calls us forward to a new life of love, grace and potential.

Let's work on this image a bit. If we concur that at the core of God's being is love and we are created in the image of God, then at the center of our existence is God's love. When God sees us, really sees us, does God not see God's own image, the image of love. Those who have children, think for a moment of the times we have seen ourselves reflected in their behavior, their attitudes, and their speech. Even in their rebellion we see their reflected our love and we love. It is a bit more difficult, but the same can be said of our parents. How often have we found ourselves behaving, acting, saying the things that disturbed us about our parents, yet here we are created in their image.

When God sees us, I am confident that God sees the image that came with the first breath of life. God sees the potential of who we are and can become.

I think that as we consider the ministry of the church, we need to adopt this same model. When we look at others, we need to overcome our willingness to classify them first, to define them: they are homeless, they are wealthy, they are of a different ethnicity, they are Gay or Straight. We need to discipline ourselves to see the person, the Man and the Woman that they are, the person God created and gave life. I have learned this lesson on more than one occasion.

Several years ago, Bev and I were in New York City learning the subway system and were delighted to learn how helpful New Yorkers could be. One particular afternoon we got on an overly crowded subway, we prepared to stand for our ride, when two young men sitting near the door, got up and gave us their seat. These two courteous men, they had hair spiked in several directions, every color of the rainbow, and with more metal attached through a variety

of piercings than what was hanging in Grand Central Station. It was these two who out of courtesy and consideration gave us their seats.

I would like to conclude with one final true story as told by Fred Craddock. The setting is a mountain community situated in the hills of Tennessee, there dwelled in this community a single mother who had a son out of wedlock, in the early 30's this was not accepted and the young boy was considered to be illegitimate. His father and mother were not married and the father had abandoned the son and mother. His mother who worked late on Saturday nights did not give much guidance to him and he was allowed to roam free on Sunday mornings. One Sunday morning, he was curious about what went on inside the local Christian Church. He crept up close to the windows and listened. We do not know what he heard that continued his curiosity, several weeks past with him listening through the window, when he ventured into the back of the church and sat on the floor behind the back pew. He was always careful to leave before the service was over fearful that someone would see him, recognize him and say something. One particular Sunday he was enamored with the hymns, the sermon, the prayers and as the service closed he realized he had crept down the aisle, was sitting about a third of the way down, as the service ended he jolted up and started out the back door, when he heard the commanding words of the minister, Stop young man, I know you, I know whose son you are, don't you see the resemblance, YOU ARE GOD'S SON!" That young man went on to become the Governor of Tennessee.

When we see another person, our first response for health, healing and life should be, I know you, I see the resemblance, you are God's daughter, you are God's son.