

*The Mirror*

Shepherd's Grace Church

October 26, 2014

*When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they all gathered together. Then, one of them, a lawyer asked as question to test Him. "Teacher," he asked, "which of the commandments of the law is the greatest commandment?" Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and the greatest of all the commandments, and there is a second that is like it. You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself. Upon these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

*Then, while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question. "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They answered, "The son of David." Jesus said, "How is it then that David, speaking in the Spirit, refers to Him as Lord?" David says, "the Lord said to my Lord, sit here at my right hand while I put your enemies under your feet." If David then refers to Him as Lord, how can he be David's son? None of them was able to answer, neither did anyone dare to ask him any more questions. (Matt. 22: 34-46) (Also read Deut. 34: 1-12)*

*The Mirror*

Waiting in the hall by the door to the house

I stand a silent guard, a reminder of the Word

Let all who enter to this place find peace as their reward!

Let all who enter to this place see the image of the Lord!

Waiting in the hall by the door to the house

I speak to all who enter here though not a word is said

They glance, they stop, they stare, they sigh

Yet few remind themselves of what they hear, how they reply

Waiting in the hall by the door to the house

Let all who enter to this place find love as their reward

Let all who enter to this place see hope within my face

For what they see as they stare at me is God's deep love and Grace

This was Ark-a-lalah week. Many of us were there for the food and the fun and the fellowship! Many enjoyed the connection with others in our community that we only see at this time of the year. Some

enjoyed class reunions while others had family in for special times! Ark-a-lalah is a great event in our community. I have lived in many towns, both large and small and have never been part of a community where a single event like this one consumed so much of the community's effort and energy. Planning for Ark-a-lalah begins as soon as this year's event ends and conversation around town in every month of the year will be about how to make next year's event even bigger and better than last years.

I only have a small part in Ark-a-lalah. I am a member of Kiwanis and my part of the event has to do with the annual Pancake Feed. Kiwanis regularly serves over 2000 people and this year was no exception. We keep hourly records of how many people we take tickets from so we can tell about how much help we will need. This year, the event had people lined up out the door from about 8 A.M. till 11:30 A.M. while four of us cooked as many pancakes as we could get on our grills. Two people were cooking sausage as fast as they could turn it out and coffee was being made in 5 gallon coffee makers! It was an amazing sight and when I had a chance to look up, I saw many people I knew and just about everyone I saw seemed to be having a great time!

This year's event had a new wrinkle for Kiwanis however. This year we had new grills. Our old equipment was purchased and put into use in 1946. It served us for 68 years and it served well! When we set up the new equipment, however, there were no tears shed over the heavy old cast iron pipes and fittings and griddles that we did not have to lug around and set up this year. We were all very excited to simply roll the grills out and be ready to go. When we rolled our bright, shiny, stainless aluminum grills out, we all cheered!

Our excitement, however is not to imply that there were no problems. Old griddles were always prepared. They were oiled and ready for almost immediate use. These new grills, though bright and shiny were in need of preparation. They needed to be oiled, heated, tested, and used. Even though we did some of that on Friday, we did not do testing for the use a grill would get serving 2000 people pancakes! Early in the day on Saturday, we struggled to get temperatures set properly. We were constantly adjusting and the pancakes we were used to turning out were not coming off the grill in nearly the same way. Some got their grills adjusted early and began turning out beautiful golden brown hotcakes that the people of Ark City are used to. Others of us, myself included had to struggle and in fact, there was a part of my grill that was too hot all day long.

As I worked to adjust my grill, I looked with great envy at the beautiful pancakes my partners on each side were turning out! It was frustrating that I could not get my settings adjusted and it was a little embarrassing that I could not get my pancakes to come out to the beautiful color and consistency I expected.

At this point, It would have been easy to point fingers! It would have been easy to say that these new grills were worthless. It would have been easy to want to go back to the old grills and the extra time that someone (not me) had to spend setting them up and getting them plumbed correctly so the gas flowed to them with no leaks or danger. It would have been easy to complain and say that someone (again, not me) should have spent more time testing on Friday so we were ready for Saturday!

Instead, however, one of my partners took the time to come to my aid! One of my partners came over and looked at my grill and helped me get it regulated so that it too could begin to turn out pancakes the way his was! One of my partners put aside his own success so that we could all enjoy success and so that we could continue the tradition that has been part of our Ark-a-lalah event for more than 75 years!

Sometime during the day yesterday, I thought about this help in connection to the scripture from Deuteronomy that we read today! I thought about it in terms of vision and mission. I remembered that our goal in Kiwanis is not only to turn out beautiful golden brown pancakes. Our goal is to communicate a vision for service that drives us all to do more. Our vision is not about us, it is about our future, our children. Our vision is about what we hope the world can look like as the lives of children are changed and as they are given greater opportunities to succeed!

Kiwanis mission statement is: *Kiwanis is a global organization of volunteers dedicated to changing the world one child, one community at a time!* Our mission is not to make and sell pancakes! Our mission is to provide an opportunity for children who would not have that opportunity without the resources we can provide. Our vision is not to cook pancakes. It is to care for kids, to see in them a future filled with possibilities, possibilities we cannot even begin to imagine. Our vision is what keeps us working, keeps us trying to figure out how to regulate grills and flip even more flapjacks! Our vision is what keeps us moving forward! To state it in an even more obvious way, *Vision is what lets us see.*

We at Shepherd's Grace have a vision. It is printed in our bulletin every week. Sometimes I think we do not talk about it enough and if you haven't read it in awhile, here it is: ***We see Shepherd's Grace Church as a place where God will provide guidance and direction for all, that encourages inclusive affirmation that we are all servants of the will of God, bearing witness to His strength and grace in all of our lives. We see our lives together lived out in boldness that comes from the bond of friendship and communion where all are called to grow in relationship with God and one another. We take our direction from the Word of God so that we can learn and share as we encourage the peace and love of God where nothing is missing and nothing is broken. Our mission is G.I.F.T. (Growing in faith together!)***

We try to take our vision and mission seriously and I will be honest, when I struggle with what we are doing in the mission and ministry of our church, I turn to our vision. Just as I turned to our vision at Kiwanis on Saturday to work through the frustration of the moment I was experiencing, I also turn to our vision to work through struggles we have at the church. Vision lets us imagine the future. It reminds us that we are not working for the moment we are in, but that we are part of something bigger, something more important than just us. We are part of the future! We are part of God's plan for the coming of God's kingdom! We are those who reach out and touch the hand, in some ways, see the face of God and live! We are those who move beyond what we see in this moment, trusting God who we know works from the future and in some small way make the future a present reality. We do this through our vision!

This is the message God is sharing with us this morning through the death of Moses! God takes Moses to the top of Mount Nebo not to tease Moses with all he will not have, but to share all Moses has

worked for! He takes Moses to the top of the mountain to share His vision of the land Moses has been leading his people to! He wants Moses to know, to see, to share His vision of what the world will look like because of Moses' willingness to work tirelessly for a promise that was made long ago! Tis is the land promised to Abraham who never dwelled in it! It was the land of Isaac who never lived in it! It was the land of Jacob who never possessed it! It was the land promised to their ancestors and now it was shown to Moses, not as a taunt but as a vision!

We know it was a vision because it was described in the future and not in the past. It was shown in boundaries, the territories of Dan and Benjamin and Nephtali were all laid out! This is significant because they would not have been laid out by the Israelites yet! They would only be known in the future! In God's future! It was not God's intent to remind Moses on the top of Mount Nebo of all his failures but to remind him of the fulfillment of all God's promises! It was God's intention to remind Moses of the vision he had been working for all these years and that, while it was not his to complete, it was to be completed!

Sometimes, we think because we articulate a vision, we are the only ones who can see the vision, the only ones who can carry it through. God wants us to know that when we are privileged to see visions and dream dreams (Joel 2) they are God's dreams, God's ideas, God's plans for our future and while we do get to work toward them, pursuing them into a future filled with purpose and passion, we do not always get to see them completed. Moses' glimpse into the future this morning tells us that and one more thing. It tells us that when God gives vision, God gives hope! That hope comes as we struggle with grills that do not adjust correctly and with ministries that do not always go smoothly! Hope comes as we persevere! Hope comes as one leaves their task to come to the aid of another who is struggling to accomplish his! Hope comes as we come together!

This is the intersection of our Hebrew lesson today and the lesson Matthew teaches through the words of Jesus! In order to understand the intersection, it is necessary to understand a little about the two groups Matthew mentions this morning. First he speaks about the Sadducees. These are leaders in Israel who have formed to maintain a very exact status quo. They resent Roman rule and the changes that have taken place since the Greeks came to dominate their land back in the 300's B.C.. They believe the vision God gave to Moses did not include outside rule or influence. They believe the Law, exactly as was given to Moses is intended to be the Law of the land and that there can be no exceptions. Often times they find themselves at odds with the Pharisees on points of power because they are unwilling to compromise. On one point, however they are in agreement. Jesus is a threat to the way of life of the status quo and they are agreed against the change in life he proposes!

The Pharisees, the second group Matthew mentions are more open to compromise with the Roman rulers who occupy Israel and Matthew's Jesus perceived as one who is stirring rebellion against the Romans and the religious in order to present an image of God who does not want oppression of any people. He associates with those who are unclean and unworthy and they perceive him as a threat to their comfortable way of life! Because he is a threat to this part of the status quo as well, the Pharisees find themselves in an uncomfortable alliance with the Sadducees. As it is stated in "The Art of War," *The enemy of my enemy is my friend.*

When the Pharisees learn that Jesus silences the Sadducees, they come to their defense. They want to continue the strategy begun a few verses ago of trying to trap Jesus in what he says. The Sadducees, having the same strategy, tried unsuccessfully to best Jesus on the issue of resurrection. They argued that there is no evidence in the Torah, the first 5 books of the Hebrew Bible, in favor of resurrection but Jesus refutes them as he refers to Exodus 3 and God's claim that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I AM is present tense indicating that these three are still alive and are part of a whole cloud of witness to God's living presence!

The Pharisees seeing Jesus prophetic claim grow stronger now come together to try again to trap him. "What is the greatest commandment in the law?" they ask. This is a straight forward question and the answer is a simple one. The greatest commandment is the first commandment. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind." This is the essence of the first of the 10 commandments and is the statement made by Moses in the *Shema in Deuteronomy 6*. God's vision for this command however, goes farther. Jesus says, "There is a second commandment that is like this one. 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself!' On these two hang all the law and the prophets!"

With his answer he gives the correct response to the Pharisees and opens for them a vision that God opened to Moses on Mount Nebo and opens to all of us today! God's vision is not just of the land but of people working together to create fruit from the land. People of all tribes and nations, of all tongues finding a way to get along! God's vision is for a future of possibility created because people recognize the truest form of loving God is expressed in love of neighbor! This expression is fulfilled as we catch a glimpse of God's greatness expressed in the greatness that comes from knowing and realizing the potential that exists inside each one of us!

The Catholic Church understands such expression! When a person walks through their churches or cathedrals, one cannot help but notice the paintings and statuary on display. These expressions are art but they are more than art. The works we see are commissioned not from artists but from iconographers. Iconographers create icons of course! Icons are deeper expressions of art! They are intended to invite the viewer to see their work from a deeper perspective. Iconographers are commissioned to create through prayerful beginnings, inviting the power of the Holy Spirit to lead them into the creation. Their prayer is that God will reveal the heart of their creation and not just that which is on the surface!

Of course, we know iconography in the world today don't we? We use it nearly every day. Just look at the screen on your smart phone or your I Pad. What do you see? You see Icons and you know that you cannot understand the fullness of what lies inside the icon until you click on it and go inside. It is only on the inside that you can begin to understand all that it has to offer, all the knowledge available, all the potential that is stored there!

I believe we have an icon in our sanctuary today. We see it every time we enter the sanctuary. In the painting given by my friend James, we see a measure of who James is as we stare deeply at what he has created. He started with a blank canvass! It had nothing on it and as he lived his life, it was filled with bitterness and hatred, a sense of hopelessness! As a result, James, in a moment of anger and

rage took the lives of two people. He is now sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison with no hope of release! Somewhere inside his prison, however, James found possibility for purpose he had never experienced before. If we look inside James' painting, we see that hope. We see the cross and resurrection, the joining of the Holy Spirit and the eternal presence of God! We see a depth when we stare at James' work that can only be revealed by God! In this depth, we can begin to perceive the possibility for purpose and passion that only God can provide!

In James' work and even in the work of Di Vinci and Michael Angelo, however we see only in part. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, "for now, I see only in part but then I will see fully even as I have been fully seen." There is one iconographer who creates the fullness we seek. God is the ultimate iconographer! When God creates an icon it reveals completely all that God wants to show! "And what Icons has God created," you might ask?

Look at Genesis 1: 26-29. "Let us create humankind," God says. "In our own image and likeness let us create them." And the icons God creates are people. From lumps of clay just as sculptors use, God creates. But God creates knowing the work of his hands and wanting all of humanity to know it. "While you were still in your mother's womb, I formed and made you." (Jer.2) God says! It is God's fondest hope that we will look at this creation and gaze deeply into it and recognize in it the love with which it is created! God wants us to love one another because we can see God in the faces and in the hearts of one another. As we see these elements of God, God hopes we will be so filled with awe that we will fall in love with each other because of the love God has for each of us in our very creation!

When Jesus says that the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, He is inviting us to look in the mirror! In the mirror we can see deeply. We cannot see clearly or fully yet, but we can imagine the love God has for us because of the way God shares the world with us! Our appreciation of creation comes from looking deeply within ourselves and recognizing that within us exists the very stuff of creation! Within each of us is the image and likeness of God which exists for the purpose of giving praise to God for all we are and all we can be! Our mission is to Grow in faith together recognizing that it is only together as neighbors that we can fully express our love of God, for it is only in loving our neighbor that we can fulfill the greatest commandment God gives!

When Jesus asked the question of the Pharisees, what do you think of Messiah? Whose son is he? Jesus was asking not to trap the Pharisees but to open their eyes to the same vision God has given to Moses. He wants the Pharisees to recognize not only God's love for them but the opportunity they have to see a future in relationship with God and all of humanity! The Pharisees want to refuse the answer. They want to claim that the messiah is only a human creation. They want to claim that he is the son of David but Jesus wants them to know that the Messiah is the son of the living God! He points out the iconic nature of the Messiah.

"David speaking in the Spirit (Holy Spirit) says, "The Lord says to my lord, sit here at my right hand while I put your enemies under your feet!" In David's words we find the vision God has given to Moses, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob; the vision of a future, not a past, the vision of promise and

hope. Jesus wants the Pharisees to know that there is hope in God's love. That it is a love founded on a pure and genuine desire to create a kingdom beyond the ways of the world.

Jesus wants the Pharisees to know that it is not a kingdom of this world but of the future, a future where God dwells with God's people, setting aside all strife and struggle! Jesus is speaking about a future where all people, slave and free, Jew and Gentile, women and men get along. He wants the Pharisees to know that this future exists in their hearts. He wants them to look in the mirror and recognize that the future he promises is one of their making. It is the future God envisioned for Moses when he led him to the top of Mount Nebo. It is the future God envisions for us still today.

God's future is in the mirror! God's future is in the way we see ourselves, as friends and as neighbors to others! God's future is in the way we see one another and in the way we work together to build the Kingdom! God's future is not a dream, it is a reality and it is in the promise of God's Messiah!

The Pharisees refused that promise. Their leadership would continue to reject the hope offered by God and they would turn away. The world today is not much different. Today we do not look in the mirror either. We cannot see beyond the reflection of wealth and treasure stored here in our world. God, however invites a different vision. God invites us to stare deeply into our own reflection, to recognize in the mirror the iconic image staring back at us. God invites us to see in the mirror the very face of God; an image and likeness filled with hope and promise. As you enter your house, as you recognize the peace and protection you enjoy, God invites you and me to look in the mirror! Amen!