

Rev. Dr. Rebecca L. Kiser
Seeing As God Sees
June 6, 2021 Pentecost 2B

It's probably one of those "duh!" statements to say that God looks at things differently than we do. I've been exploring this kind of thought in my last couple sermons, and practicing trying to imagine what God sees as I go about my own day-to-day life. Do you ever wonder that? For example: I've been very aware of the presence of the Spirit since that afternoon on my back porch when I watched the shimmer of the leaves moved by the wind in the sunlight, and imagined the Spirit to be as present as the wind; and like the wind, the Spirit moving around everything and in everything, including myself. I walk in the air and breathe the air - just so I imagine that I walk in the Spirit and breathe in the Spirit.

I really hope some of you all sat in your backyards after that sermon and tried it out. I'd love for you to tell me what that was like for you. If you haven't done it, however, here's another invitation to try it. Because, of course, the presence of God's Spirit in us and around us and all creation - is actually reality. We may not see it like we do material things, but it's true nonetheless; God tells us it is. Reminding myself of this reality off and on during each day has made the presence of God a more real experience to me. I think about this when I'm driving, of God being all around; I think about it when I'm in the waiting room for a doctor visit, and imagine God there in the room; I thought about God's presence with me inside the MRI tube this week when I was almost freaking out from the closed-in space there; I thought about God's presence when I was sending emails to folks about upcoming baptisms, ordering VBS materials, and running into the UPS man at the door - - I've felt that God's Spirit was in and around all these moments of my days.

I thought about all the people I've met these past couple weeks, considered the interactions between us, and thought of the Spirit being there. Not every time I met somebody, because my focus shifts, I get involved in what I'm doing, and I forget to remember God's presence ... but I WAS aware a lot more often. Like with the MRI technician, or the intake person at the doctor's office, and the people sitting around waiting their appointment time - I wondered about them, what God was doing in their lives, where they are in their spirituality, what problems they're having in their family - and I prayed for them. I thanked the MRI technician for talking to me so nicely while I was in that tube and not opening my eyes. I

noticed that the cashier at Green Hills seemed distracted, and I asked him if he was having a hard day.

Lots of times, the hours and days go by in a blur of tasks that have to be done, and schedules that have to be kept, and plans for the next week or month that have to be made; and we, I, get task-focused, thinking about what I have to do when I get home, while I'm checking out at the grocery store, and not really present to the current moment. Thinking about calls I have to make while I'm actually driving home, instead of my mind being on the driving. Being aware of the present moment and what you're doing is called 'mindfulness.' And mindfulness is an important aspect of spirituality, of walking with Christ in the world. Practicing the presence of God is the title of a book from centuries ago, written by a monk named Brother Laurence - he wrote about being aware of God's presence while he cooked for the brothers, while he washed the dishes, and all his life. Nowadays we call that mindfulness. Knowing that moment by moment, God is here. When the kids frustrate us, God is here; when we're planning a memorial service, God is here; when we're walking on the treadmill or lifting weights at the gym, God is here; when we're measuring twice before cutting once, God is here. Being in the moment and aware of God here is a spiritual practice - because, of course, God IS there, and here - that's the truth, that's the unseen reality.

And of course, here in this outside sanctuary today, gathered for worship, God is also here. God is with me speaking, God is with each of you listening and having your own thoughts. God's Spirit is with Bob at the electronic piano, and (the person working the MeVo). We see the breeze moving the trees on pretty much every side of us - the Spirit is here moving, too. God is above us, beneath us, to our left and to our right, God is in front of us and behind us; God is in us, we breathe God in, we live in God. Don't you wonder what God sees?

Jesus looks at the crowd around him - some listening intently, some thinking he's off his rocker, some feeling criticized perhaps - what does Jesus see? He sees that these folks hungry for God are his kin, he is connected to them in a deep way. Yes, he has blood relatives who've come to try and keep him from acting so crazy religious - and he loves them - yet he loves all those seeking God in an equal way. These are ALL my mothers and sisters and brothers, he says. Jesus sees people that are beloved of God, despite how they're dressed, or what gender they are, how rich they look, or what province they're from. Jesus loves them and wants them to

be whole, to be healed, to be fed; Jesus wants them to step into this kingdom he talks about, and live in the ways of God.

What a way to look at the people that WE meet in our lives - our customers, or those serving us, or those driving next to us, or those in the waiting room with us, the person who jumps in front of us in the checkout line, or who crowds us at the grocery aisles. The children in our class, the teacher of our class, our neighbors out walking their dogs and their noisy kids, or the guy blasting his music through his open car windows at the streetlight. What does God see? Can I learn to see the way God sees? Can being mindful of God's presence change the way I look at people? Yes.

From the 2nd letter to the Christ-followers in Corinth, the apostle Paul writes that everything he does is for them, so that knowledge and love of God will spread to many people, so that thankfulness to God will grow, and praise to God will arise everywhere. That's a very Christ-like way of looking at what we do in our lives, a way of being mindful of our actions as contributing to the knowledge and love of God, and the increase of thankfulness and praise to God. That's a good way to evaluate the ways we react instead of responding to people who bother us, or the way we teach or interact. "React" refers to a more knee-jerk, unthinking reaction - they blow up at us, we blow up back. "Respond" refers to being enough in the moment to mentally think quickly of what the situation needs, what is better, what will reflect more on their value as a person - and what I need as well. One gets better at this with practice. I think of "reacting" as how the parent yells at the frustrated kid who says "I hate you!" I think of "respond" as how a loving parent realizes the child is frustrated and can't really manage or name his overwhelming feelings, and instead of yelling, says, "I know you feel very angry and frustrated right now with the decision I've made." If one is present to the moment, one can respond instead of react; if one is aware of God's presence, one can call on that love and patience of the Spirit.

Several years back, I was waiting for a Physical Therapy appointment with a terrible headache and a tense neck, and they kept me sitting in the waiting room 30 plus minutes, getting madder and madder; I was hurting badly, and I'd been on time, and my time was tight what with 3 kids in school and lots of details to do as a single parent. So when I finally got to the room with the PT guy, I let him know in no uncertain terms that I'd been sitting there in pain, that I'd been on time. I was actually crying, I was so upset. I felt misused. This guy looked down at his

feet for a minute without speaking - if he'd have come back blaming or shaming me, I'd have yelled louder, I was pretty angry. But what he said was that he was sorry for my wait and my pain, and did I want to go on with the appointment, or did I need to reschedule? He evidently took that moment with his head bowed to center himself and not react defensively or in his own anger at me, like it would be easy for a busy person to do, who was just trying to work with the patients that came before me. He put the ball in my court, and duh - why would I go away now that I was here? He defused the situation. So I followed his example and collected myself, and let him teach me some movements that would relieve my headaches. Later the same PT guy worked with my son who was hurt in wrestling, and showed the same patience and control of his own feelings. I still think of him as an example of a good, mature response that respected me.

Paul tells us that it's the unseen things around us that are eternal. It's our inner nature that is being renewed daily, even as our bodies age and things happen to them that need dr appointments and MRIs. The outer trappings we mistakenly value will rust, break, get stolen, fall apart, get moth holes, tear, whatever - just like our outer bodies will eventually succumb to the pain of old age if we live long enough. It's the inner person, the inner life, that will be renewed and live on. Our mindfulness, our kindness, our maturity and learning to respond in love and respect; our spreading of the grace of God; like we said last week, so that the kingdom of God will be where we are. Our caring for any person we come across as we see them with God's eyes, see their value, their worth; see their need and care about it as if they are family - because the reality is, they are.

As we partake together now of these elements from God's creation, let us ponder Christ's presence with us, ponder our connectedness to God, each other, all Christ-followers, and God's creation. May we be mindful of this moment, and of God's abiding presence even right now.

AMEN.