

The lens we see ourselves and others with is important. Why? Because, for example—it makes a big difference if we see someone through the lens of prejudice or acceptance. Through the lens of curiosity or distrust.

In the letter from Paul this morning, we hear him telling the people of Phillipi about the lens he saw himself through, prior to his encounter with Jesus. He was: “*circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*” In other words, an exemplary Jew of his day.

Today that would correlate to someone seeing themselves through the lens of being: *Joe or Jane Smith--a citizen of the great United States, proudly from the state of Maine. Born here, not from away. Honored by the town as a great citizen, a vestry member of the church. Bible believing. Persecutor of people who behave in ways counter to what the bible says.*

All very righteous. Joe and Jane see themselves as loud and proud. They certainly don't see themselves as being arrogant when we see themselves that way.

But after Paul experiences Jesus--*and Jesus' love*—suddenly the lens through which he sees himself changes. All the things that the *world—and his ego*—saw as important are revealed for what they are: judgmental and arrogant. His former way of seeing the world was through so much smoke that it clouded his judgments and made his vision cloudy.

It's as if Paul has previously worn glasses that he was constantly having to clean and clear, when suddenly—after encountering Jesus-- he can see everything clearly. He is now seeing through the clarity of the lens of love.

In the Gospel reading today we have Jesus eating at the house of friends with some of the disciples. Mary seems to have sensed a couple of things: how dangerous it will be for Jesus to continue to teach about love of God and neighbor—especially if that includes ALL neighbors, a how much she loves and wishes to honor Jesus.

She takes her oil and anoints him. She sees him-- and his ministry- through the lens of love.

Judas sees through a very different lens. He perceives Jesus' words to be dangerous to his community. He's not sure of these radical new ideas about fraternizing with sinner—he prefers a Messiah who be a lion and not a lamb. He especially doesn't like this new involvement of women in this group, either – as we can see from his dismissive words to Mary.

So Jesus rebukes him. Judas does not see through the lens of love, but the lens of fear, superiority and pride.

Let's be honest, here: it will always be our choice as to what lens we look through to understand the world and each other.

In the past couple of years, we have often seen the world through the lens of anxiety. We're anxious about the pandemic and illness, we are anxious about the price of oil, we are jittery about Russia and Putin, we are anxious about the people of Ukraine. All the ground under our feet seems to be shifting-- so our default is anxiety.

Anxiety is not the best lens to view life from—so to feel more in control, we try to see things through the other optics:

- We try the lens of **judgement**. We spend time judging which ideas, which countries, which actions are worthy of our energy.
- We try the lens of **righteousness** – or justice as it is often translated. We spend a lot of time figuring out who deserves justice, and who does not.
- We try the lens of **watching**—we spend enormous time trying to figure out everything, watching and reading all new sources of information.

And these lenses are fine as far as they go.

- But in the end—*judgement can devolve into opinion.*
- *Righteousness can quickly become self-righteousness*
- And watching can become *inertia*.

And then we feel stuck again. Back at square one.

Jesus, Mary and finally Paul understood that there is only one lens that allows us to really see the world --and each other—clearly: the lens of love.

When we look at each other through the lens of love, we are given the opportunity to see each other as they are, not as we think they are, or wish they are. But as they *actually* are. In all their folly and marvelousness! But to many, seeing the world and each other this way is unrealistic, unsound, even dangerous.

So—many define themselves by what they are against, by what and who they hate, by who else is wrong, instead of by what they believe in and who they love. Because it just feels safer to them. And it may be safer.

But it's not the lens that will allow us to see the way Jesus wants us to see.

Seeing the world through the lens of love forces us to drop our guards, be vulnerable, and give God a chance to change us. God longs to crack us open and give us this new way of seeing each other: with unguarded hearts, and new freedom. Then, God clears the smoke, topples our fortifications, and opens every shut door of love between us all.

But only if we're willing to take off our old, cracked glasses, and look at the world through the clear and undimmed lens of love. Amen.