

All the readings today have something to say on the subject of seeing. And seeing is not the same as looking, and we all know that from those optical illusions we see. Two people can look at the same piece of paper and some will see an old woman, some will see a young woman. You know the ones I'm talking about. I particularly like the tests for color blindness because it's amazing to me that those of us without color blindness will look at a sheet of paper and see a massive blue 73 or something. And people who do suffer from color blindness will just see a page of spots. They'll look at the same thing but see something different.

I, like most men, will look in the fridge, but not see what I'm looking for. Many times, Laura will say to me, "Honey, can you get the butter?" And I'll think, "Oh, no." Open up the fridge and look in. I'll say, "It's not here." There'll be loud huffing sounds. She'll come and then the triumphant sound of Laura picking the butter out of the fridge, not needing to say anything. I have learnt now, I've got a new tactic that if that happens, I do move a few things around first before saying that I can't find it, just to show that I have actually looked.

In our Old Testament reading today, we hear about the old prophet Eli. The passage begins with the writer pointing out that Eli's sight was failing, and he couldn't see. He couldn't see, or rather, chose not to see the bad things that his sons were getting up to bringing the temple into disrepute. And then, in that psalm, that beautiful psalm that the choir sang for us, the psalmist says this to God, "You have searched me out and known me. Your eyes behold my limbs yet unfinished in the womb."

But the most obvious discussion about seeing is in that gospel reading from John. Philip, we are told, was excited to meet Jesus in Galilee and says to his friend, Nathaniel, "We've found the Messiah from Nazareth." But Nathaniel doesn't share Philip's excitement. And he says, sarcastically, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" "Come and see," says Philip enthusiastically. So, Philip drags, Nathaniel to see Jesus. But here's the twist in the story. Jesus sees Nathaniel first and Jesus sees Nathaniel and says something which seems a bit peculiar, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Might sound odd to us, but clearly it hit home to Nathaniel. It

struck a chord with him because he then says to Jesus, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus says, "I saw you under the fig tree."

So, something amazing has happened to Nathaniel who acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah, the son of God. To which Jesus replies, "Well, you'll see greater things than these." So, the story that starts with Philip taking Nathaniel to see Jesus becomes a story about the power of Nathaniel being seen by Jesus. And I want to stay for a moment and talk about the power of being seen. Jesus had a choice when it came to Nathaniel. Instead of calling out Nathaniel's purity of heart, Jesus might've said, "Here's a cynic who's stunted by doubt. Here's someone who's hopelessly sarcastic and caustic. Here's a man who is blunt and careless with his words." Or he could have said, "Here's a man who sits around under trees all day, waiting for life to happen to him."

And some or all of those might have been true about Nathaniel, but Jesus looked past them to see the honesty and guilelessness in his heart that made up the core of Nathaniel's true character. Maybe the other qualities were there as well, but would Nathaniel have melted in wonder and joy if Jesus had named those first? I doubt it. I think he'd have shriveled up with embarrassment and shame. Jesus looked right into Nathaniel's soul and saw, clearly saw him for who he truly was and saw him in a way that Nathaniel felt fully known and fully seen. Jesus named the quality he wanted to bless in this would-be follower, the quality that made Nathaniel an image-bearer of God. What makes salvation possible in this story isn't what Nathaniel sees in Jesus, but rather what Jesus sees in Nathaniel. It is that sense of being seen that overwhelms the psalmist. "How deep I find your thoughts, oh God," the psalmist said.

Seeing's always selective. We have choices when it comes to what we see, what we prioritize, what we name, what we call out in each other. The selves that we present to the world are layered and messy. And it takes both love and patience to sift through those layers to find out what lies at the core of who we really are. But there's a great power in that sifting, something healing and holy happens to us when we're deeply seen, known and accepted. And Nathaniel experienced that power of being seen. When Jesus saw him under the tree, he knew that

Jesus was seeing him. And I have an invitation for all of us today. When we come to the front to receive communion and we kneel and we hold out our hands, make a point of remembering that Jesus sees you just as he saw Nathaniel, as you really are, that there is no pretense with Jesus. He sees beneath the layers we surround ourselves with and he loves us and accepts us. He sees us.

Well, so much for being seen. I just want to say a few words about seeing. And we've heard a lot in recent years about what would Jesus do, but there's another question I'd invite us to consider today is, what would Jesus see? And we all see in different ways and Jesus saw in a very particular way. I had a vivid example of this once on a boat. So, it was about a dozen of us on a little fishing boat and there was a couple of kids there. And after a few minutes, one of the kids shouted out, "Quick, quick, come and look and see." So, of course, all the adults went over, and the boat listed rather alarmingly, and the kid pointed in the water and there was a jellyfish floating past.

Well, all the adults in the back of the boat who'd been watching these jellyfish going past for ages, but it took a child who'd never seen one before to look at it and see it for what it was, such an unusual and spectacular creature of God. They were seeing with fresh eyes, in a new way, different to the others.

We can all look and fail to see or not see clearly or rightly. And our epistle, which does seem a bit odd, I think Paul there is urging his readers to see themselves rightly, to understand their bodies as sacred, as temples of the Holy Spirit, not cheap and expendable commodities. He's inviting them to see their bodies as sacred vessels bought at a high price for the glory of God. What would Jesus see?

An older tutor of mine's actually written a book that's just come out with that very title. What Would Jesus See? And he writes this, "At the core of Jesus's short ministry was a recurring call to look at the world, and especially its most disadvantaged denizens with new eyes. Few people in the history of the world have understood as clearly and intuitively as Jesus that the way we look at people is intimately entwined with how we treat them." That's a very profound thought. The way we look at people is intuitively entwined with how we treat them. And that's an insight that

we do well to consider on this outreach Sunday, the day in the year when we raise the profile and present all the partner ministries that we work with in our mission, in our outreach.

Today's a day we're invited not just to look at Jesus, but to look with Jesus. What do we see when we look at the most vulnerable people in our society? Do we look at someone who's poor and just think they're lazy? Do we see someone who's living on the streets and label them simply a homeless person? Do we see some people as illegal? In *Just Mercy*, the great book on the blight of mass incarceration, Bryan Stevenson writes this, "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done. Each of us benefits from a second or a third or a fourth look. To offer that second look, that deeper kinder, more penetrating look is grace. It's the gracious vision of Jesus and it's the vision we're called to practice in a world that judges and condemns too quickly. Is there anything that feels lonelier than the experience of being unseen, misunderstood, and prematurely dismissed?"

Through our outreach ministries, we seek to look with our partners and look with Jesus at those on the margins, those who are often overlooked. And we deliberately time outreach Sunday with this weekend when we remember and celebrate the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, a man who dared to see as Jesus saw, who definitely saw with Jesus, someone who dared to call forth the best in people, both black and white, the victim and the oppressor. A man who looked deeply into the racial hatred of his day and still saw that justice would one day roll down like mighty waters. My hope is that we here at St. James are people who have been seen by Jesus in that deep and profound way that goes right to our core, that we might be given the grace to see people as Jesus sees them. And it's when we've been loved right down to the core that we find that capacity to love others as God loves them. May we experience the loving gaze of Jesus this morning and have our eyes opened to see others around us as Jesus sees them.

Amen.