

“Mirror, mirror on the Wall”

Have you ever asked a friend how they would describe you? If you were to do this you might learn some surprising things about yourself. So often we think that others see us as we see ourselves. If I look in the mirror I might focus on my flaws. That is the bumps and blemishes on my face, or perhaps that I did not get a clean shave today. In contrast, we also get so used to our visage that we don't notice what is obvious to everyone else. I remember the day in my 20s when I noticed for the first time that my nose is crooked. I was stunned. Yet when I told my discovery to family members they were nonplussed. They had known about my crooked nose all along.

There are other times when we deceive ourselves. We think we are witty and in fact we are just annoying. As a teen I thought all the puns that I made were cool, but my friends mostly moaned instead of laughing. Most days I don't think of myself as a guy with some extra pounds. In my mind's eye I am still the skinny guy I was in my 20s, and when someone described me as “stout” I was upset.

How we view ourselves is not the how others see us. In the passage that leads up to today's reading from Mark, Jesus asks the disciples who others say that he is. The disciples reply that others say he is John the Baptist, Elijah, or a prophet. When he asks the disciples who they think he is Peter immediately says, “You are the Messiah.”

That is all well and good, but when he then tells them what it means for him to be the Messiah, Peter gets upset. He is so bothered that he pulls Jesus aside and tells him to stop talking in those terms. Peter has his own idea of what it means to be the Messiah and it does not fit what Jesus is saying. Peter needs Jesus to be the Messiah in one particular way which is not what Jesus is called to be. Jesus is called to be a messiah¹ different from those who were anointed ones before him, i.e. kings Saul, David and Solomon.

His power is not earthly power like that of a king or emperor. His power is that of love and peace, care and inclusion especially for the downtrodden, the outcast and the poor. Jesus is not anointed to lead armies into battle in order to conquer lands and to force others to believe in the God of creation, sustenance and mercy. Indeed, to lead an army that conquers is anathema to the kingship that Jesus claims.

Jesus has come to claim the human heart. Jesus requires less worship and more partnership like that of a spouse and lover. Any Bible scholar will tell you that one of the main characterizations of God in the Old Testament is that of a lover or husband who is wooing the bride Israel into a covenantal relationship. The mystics of the Middle Ages latched onto this image—Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, Mechtild of Magdeburg to name just a few described the loving relationship they had with God in this way.

If we were to ask the world that is walking by or driving by this morning, who they say that we are? How do you suppose they would respond?. Would they say we are deluded and superstitious? Or would they say that we are a community of faith that is here to be strengthened for the journey? Would they say we are a hard-hearted, closed-minded club? Or would they say we are a community of caring and hope for all people regardless of belief? Would they say we are people of love? Would they say we are people of The Way—the Jesus way?

We all have many aspects to us and roles that we play. I pray that in the end when all of the roles drop off and when the blemishes and self-delusions are cleared away that what we will see and what others will recognize is that we have grounded our being in Jesus the Messiah who lived and taught love of God and neighbor. That is who I hope I will to see in my mirror and who I hope you will see in yours.

¹ From the Hebrew word מָשִׁיחַ, *mashiach* meaning anointed one