

Do You See Him?
May 25th, 2014

John 14:15-21
Easter 6 A

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<read text John 14:15-21>

Jesus tells us in the gospel today that the world no longer sees him, but we can. I for one know that I don't regularly appreciate how amazing that is. That we *can* see Jesus. Maybe to appreciate it a little better we should ask the question; what would it be like if we *couldn't*? What would any given day be like? Well, why should I even get out of bed today? I suppose because I need to feed myself. I have to go to work. Maybe I even enjoy doing my job...that's possible. But I'm really doing my best to save up money so I can be on permanent vacation the last few years of my life. And what if I'm there? What do I do with that time I have? I spend it on me. Even when I do things for others, it's really only so I can get recognition or feel good about myself. Worst case, I do everything I can to indulge every excess, because really, all I care about is how I feel and if I feel good.

And I think that's really it right there. No matter what you actually do with yourself, whether it's outwardly good or bad, it's really all about how you feel. Do I feel good about myself? Or do I just plain feel good? That's all I really care about. My entire identity, my entire self is wrapped up in my good feelings for as long as I can keep them going. But the problem is, good feelings don't last, do they? The thrill of some new experience...it fades. And repeating it, well it never brings the same rush, so you need more. And even feeling good about doing good has the same problem. It doesn't last...the compliments stop, the good feelings fade, and we just need more and more. If the value of our lives is tied up in how we feel, then it's a constant up and down ride, a constant striving to go up but inevitable crashing down. There's nothing to hold on to, nothing solid we can be sure of or call our own. And all the random events of our life beyond our control just seem to serve to infuriate us.

I don't think it's too hard to imagine what a life like this would be like. For some of us, we still remember what it was like before we could see Jesus. We can think back and know what that kind of blindness was like. That underlying aimlessness or hollow feeling that was under it all...those feelings we tried to ignore. But I think for those of us who have known Jesus our whole lives, it's even a little scarier for us to admit, we too know what this feels like, because we have lost sight of Jesus at times. It's those times when lose sight of our God that our lives are at their worst. We quickly forget all the things we know about how our God loves and cares for us and then when the bad feelings set in, it feels like the world around us has been destroyed. Because our default state is to sin and our conscience is there to make us feel guilty over our sin. All the little things we would try to do with our lives on our own are just ways to drown out the buzz of that conscience...but they don't last.

It's so much better for us when we can see Jesus. When we have our gaze fixed on him at all times, there is none of that doubt. None of that disappointment or worry. None of that feeling like we need to scramble to make our lives meaningful. The meaning of our lives goes beyond something as fickle as our feelings, and simply rests contentedly on him. Jesus gives us that meaning. So where do we find him? All these amazing things happen when we see him, but where do we look? In that plain looking book, the Bible. It begins there. The Bible is God's word. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. When we read God's word, we are looking to Jesus. And how do you see Jesus when you look at him? Today we're reminded of a man in an earthly state of humiliation, expecting that his time on this earth is drawing to a close. It was not so long ago that we looked at Jesus' suffering and saw Jesus die. Through the word we watched him endure the punishment that was prepared for us. While we were still hurling insults, he willingly got on the cross and suffered God's wrath against our failures. We watched as he proclaimed the work finished, stared in amazement as he shouted out his dying breath and we left in silence when his body grew cold. And later we saw Jesus walk again. We see him in the word, brought back from the dead by God the Father to assure us that because Jesus lives, we too shall live, just as he promises us today.

And we will watch again this next week as Jesus gives the disciples his final commands, as he blesses them and returns to heaven. That is the last the world saw of him. But we can still see him through the word. When we look in the word we see the Lord Jesus in a number of different settings, but it is a complete story and Jesus never wants us to forget the end of his earthly journey. When we think of him now, he wants us to remember his last words and his last appearance to the disciples. He has all authority over heaven and earth. He wants us to go and make disciples. He is with us to the very end of the age. He arose to heaven in triumph over the grave. When we have these things, when we carry this image of Jesus into the world, we see him everywhere. He is in charge. Those seemingly random, frustrating events that used to bother us, we see that our heavenly ruler Jesus either causing them or working through them to take care of us. We may not understand the why, the how or even the benefit at the time, but because we see Jesus, that is

all we need to see. Any thoughts of worry are taken away when we see him in our lives. He is watching over us, guarding our souls, doing everything he can to ensure that we spend eternity with him. That path may require hardship, in fact I can guarantee you it will, but when we keep our eyes on him, we understand that these things must happen so that our souls can be kept safe into eternity. The pains don't hurt as much when we keep our eyes fixed on him. The lows of emotion don't matter because we have something far more solid to cling to than feelings. And when we see him and think about him first instead of dwelling on ourselves, those bad feelings just don't last as long as they used to. We can be truly content with our eyes on Jesus.

So, why aren't we all like that all the time? Why do we still worry and fear? Why do the pains of this life still hurt so often? It's because we take our eyes off Jesus. It's like we have this weight attached to our heads. A weight called the sinful nature. We're born that way. The weight is something we can't lift on our own, all we can do is stare down at ourselves and think about ourselves and focus on ourselves and we can't see anything else. It is our inescapable natural state to only look at and think about "myself". We need the helper that Jesus promised us, the Spirit of Truth, or as we more commonly call him, the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who comes to us in the Word of God and lifts our heads up for us so that we can see Jesus. And as long as we can see Jesus, as long as our eyes are there, we can handle anything.

But the weight is still there. It is constantly pulling our gaze downward, and every poke and prod of the world is designed to steal our attention so that we'll look down once more. The Holy Spirit can keep our head up, keep us looking at Jesus, but we can only do it with his help, and he can't do it if we distance ourselves from him. His power comes to us through the Word of God. We need that power every day if we're going to see Jesus every day. If we let our connection to the word waver, if we only dig into it once in a while, our head stays halfway between, constantly looking down at the self, and only able to glance up to Jesus when something reminds us to. If we want to see Jesus all the time and receive the blessings of a contented life that he has to offer us, then we need that power of the Spirit all the time. Because without that power, the weight of the sinful nature will drag our eyes back down to ourselves and then all we can see is the problems and troubles again...and even worse we may forget about Jesus and lose our hope of eternal rescue.

And a heart that focuses on Jesus alone avoids much of the pain we cause for ourselves in the world. It is from selfishness that sin comes forth. When we focus on ourselves, sin grows in our hearts and eventually breaks out in action in our lives. When our eyes are kept fixed on Jesus, our heart stay full of his selfless love and sin has nowhere to grow within us. That's what Jesus meant by, "**If you love me, you will keep my commands.**" (v15) This is not a conditional "if". This is not Jesus egging us on to somehow *prove* our love. This is not Jesus being the manipulative person who says "If you really love me, you'd do this for me." No, Jesus is stating a factual, *causal* relationship. If A is true, B will always be true. "If it rains today, the ground will be wet," is the same kind of statement. And the word here that is translated "keep" has more in mind than just "doing" but "keeping, preserving, treasuring". If love for Jesus is in us, then we will care about what he wants us to do. And the same Spirit that keeps us looking at him, that same Spirit that fills us with love for him, that same Spirit gives us the ability to do what Jesus asks.

You know what it is. It's love. Love God above everything else and love your neighbor as yourself. We do these things not because we are forced to, not because we have something to prove or to earn or gain some kind of reward, we do them because it is enough that Jesus asks us. And when we keep our eyes on Jesus, when we see him in every corner of our lives, that is when we show this love best. With Jesus always before us, we are always reminded of his love for us, of what he has done to save us forever and what he continues to do for us daily. That fills us with love for him. With our focus on Jesus it doesn't matter as much how we are treated by the world, we don't care so much what happens to us here and so we're able to show that love to everyone around us, even the people who normally upset us so much.

Don't lose sight of Jesus. See him regularly in God's word. See him everywhere in your life. When we stop looking at him, we're the ones who suffer for it. Stay connected to the power of the Spirit, keep your eyes on Jesus and let his love for you and for others fill your life. Amen.