THROUGH THE EYES OF LOVE

Scripture Lessons: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Mark 12:28-34

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (Mk. 12:30)

Some time ago I overheard a conversation between a man and a group of women about the existence of God. The man described himself as a confirmed atheist. I found this interesting since I didn't know the church was confirming atheists nowadays. The man maintained that it is the mark of an immature mind to believe in something that cannot be empirically verified. The women argued that something could be real even if its existence could not be scientifically proven.

In response to the man's query how anyone could believe in something he/she couldn't see, one woman made an interesting point. She said that God isn't a thing like other things that exist in the universe. God is like love. We can't see love. We can't prove it is part of our life or our relationships. If we analyze love biochemically or in terms of electrical reactions that occur in a specific section of the brain, it isn't clear that what we're really talking about is love.

But, the woman said, she had experienced love. She knew its reality first hand. She knew love was real because of its effects, because of the difference love had made in her life and in the lives of people she has known.

The woman had a point. If the man had never experienced love and if he didn't believe in love, it would be unfortunate. However, this would make no difference as to its reality. Love is a part of life, part of the fabric of human existence whether you have experienced it or not. God is a part of life, part of the fabric of human existence whether you have experienced God or not.

If you experience love in your life, you see the world differently. If you experience the reality of God in your life, you see the world differently. It makes a difference, often a profound difference. Your experience alters your perception, your beliefs about life, your relationships, your values, and even your meaning in life.

The notion that visual perceptions are simply stimulations on the retina of the eye, the passive recording of sensory images from the outside world, is too simplistic. We know that several persons may perceive the same object or event quite differently. We are not simply the
passive recipients of our sensory experiences; we move out to the world in our seeing. We see through glasses colored by who we are and by the experiences we have had in life.

To a certain extent, perhaps to a great extent, we shape the reality we perceive. To a certain extent, perhaps to a great extent, we create the world in which we live. The way we perceive something affects how we respond to it. If this is the case, as it certainly seems to be, then it might be helpful to reflect on what it would mean to see through the eyes of love.

First, what would it mean for us to see ourselves through the eyes of love?

You may find it difficult to love yourself in a healthy way. Perhaps you were not loved as a child, or perhaps the love your parents felt for you was not communicated. You may believe you are not loved for who you are but only for what you do, only for what you produce. You may have internalized such high standards for yourself that you are always falling short. You may focus on your failures and shortcomings while your strengths and gifts drift out of the perceptual field. You may be unable to forgive yourself for something you did or even something that was done to you, something over which you had little or no control.

Jesus said we should love our neighbor as ourselves. He did not say we should love our neighbor and hate ourselves. Some of us feel that God can forgive everyone, accept everyone, and love everyone but us. We need to see ourselves as God sees us, through the eyes of love.

Second, what would it mean to see others through the eyes of love?

William James, the great American educator and psychologist in his book *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, describes the difference between eyes that see with love and eyes that do not. James writes:

Every Jack sees in his own particular Jill charms and perfections to the enchantment of which we stolid onlookers are stone-cold. And who has the superior view of the absolute truth, he or we? Who has the more vital insight into the nature of Jill's existence as a fact? Is he in excess, being in this matter a maniac? Or are we in defect, being victims of a pathological anaesthesia as regards Jill's magical importance?

Surely the latter; surely to Jack are the profounder truths revealed; surely Jill's palpitating little life-throbs are among the wonders of creation, are worthy of this sympathetic interest; and it is to our shame that the rest of us can not feel like Jack. For Jack realizes Jill concretely, and we do not. He struggles toward a union with her inner life, divining her feelings, anticipating her desires, understanding her limits as manfully as he can, and yet inadequately too, for he is afflicted with some blindness even here. Whilst we, dead clods that we are, do not even seek after these
things, but are contented that the portion of eternal fact named Jill should be for us as if it were not.

Jill, who knows her inner life, knows that Jack's way of taking it--so importantly--is the true and serious way; and she responds to the truth in him by taking him seriously too. May the ancient blindness never wrap itself about either of them again! Where would any of us be, were there no one willing to know us as we really are or ready to repay us for our insight by making recognizant return? We ought, all of us, to realize each other in this intense, pathetic, and important way. (p. 266)

When we see others through the eyes of love, we see them in a different way. The apostle Paul tells us the effect that this type of perception will have on our relationships. When we love, our actions will be more patient and kind. We will be less jealous and possessive. We will be able to give in graciously and not have to have our own way. We will have hope in dark times. We will be able to endure struggles that would destroy those who do not love.

Third, what would it mean to see the world, to view life through the eyes of love?

There are many different ways of viewing life. We can dwell on the bad parts and react with bitterness and anger. Or we can perceive and respond with understanding, compassion, and love. It is a matter of which glasses we choose to wear. We create the world in which we live.

In our everyday lives, the choice is most often not between love and hate but between love and indifference. Martin Buber, the Jewish theologian, describes this as the difference between an "I-Thou" relationship and an "I-It" relationship.

"I-It" objectivity has been overvalued in our culture. Men have paid the price for this in their retarded psychological development. Detached objectivity was taught as the "professional" way for physicians and psychotherapists to treat those under their care. But cool, detached objectivity does not build relationship, and loving, caring relationship is just as important as technology or technique in the healing process.

The existentialist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has said, "Cold gray eyes do not know the value of things." Try looking at your spouse, your children, your pastor or your church with cold gray eyes. Conduct an objective analysis of strengths and weaknesses and see how quickly it will kill the relationship. Try looking at the Syrian refugees with cold gray eyes and see if it will move you to respond.

Think what a difference it would make if we viewed our earth as a living organism and all the people of the world as our brothers and sisters. Our beliefs shape our perceptions, our
perceptions shape our understanding, and our understanding shapes our response. This is why it is important that we view the events of our life and life itself through the eyes of love.

Finally, what would it mean to see God through the eyes of love?

It is questionable if we can have any objective knowledge about God. The Bible contains the record of other people’s experiences, and as such they are of great but limited value. It is our experience, our faith, and our relationship with God that counts. If we are truly disciples of the Way, then we, like Jesus, need to respond to God's call. We need to embark upon our own journey, suffer our own crucifixion, and experience our own resurrection.

The only way we can truly know each other as each of us deserves and desperately needs to be known, is to love each other as Jack loves Jill. The only way we can know God personally and intimately is to love and trust God as Jesus loved and trusted God. This is why Jesus tells us that the first and greatest commandment is not that we should believe in God but that we should love God. We should love God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength. This will lead us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

There is something mysterious about this love we celebrate on Valentine's Day. It bridges the gap between two people. It spans the gulf between two worlds. Love gives rise to knowledge in our relationship with others and also in our relationship with God. The more we love people, the more clearly we perceive them. The more clearly we perceive them, the better we know them. Love is greater than faith and hope for love alone unites us with the living God.

Last week one of the television channels aired a collection of the most highly rated Super Bowl commercials of the past fifty years. Another channel compared these with some of the most creative commercials of all time. These shows brought back a lot of memories. Do you remember the commercial where Mean Joe Green of the Pittsburgh Steelers tosses his jersey to the little boy who has shared his Pepsi with him? That one still gets me. Joe Green and the boy in the commercial, who are now considerably older, were interviewed for the show. Both were in tears when they talked about the commercial and the deep friendship that has evolved from it.

The commercial that brought Darlene and me to tears, however, was not a Super Bowl commercial. It was for an agency that provides services to the handicapped. In the commercial a little boy is staring through the bars of a cage at a little dog. The owner of the dog pound tells the boy that he doesn’t want that dog. That dog is blind in one eye. What he wants is a good dog, a
dog that is not handicapped. The little boy doesn’t budge. He continues to stare through the bars at a cute little one-eyed dog that is looking up at him.

The next scene is the little boy happily carrying the partially blind dog out of the pound. The camera pans down to the little boy’s legs. One of his legs is artificial, mechanical from the knee down. The little handicapped boy is lovingly carrying home the little handicapped dog. The caption across the screen reads, “We need to develop the ability to see past the disability.”

The little boy sees the dog through different eyes from the owner of the pound. The little boy sees through the eyes of love. He has the ability to see past the disability. If he can do this for the dog, he hopefully will be able to do it for himself.

No matter who we are, no matter what our faults, we are incarnations of God. We are part of God and God dwells within us. Jesus tells us that God sees us through the eyes of love. God loves us; God wants us to love ourselves; and God wants us to love one another.

In a time when many people seem to have lost their sense of a personal relationship with God, the question, "How can we know God?" becomes important. We know God when we build a relationship with God that is characterized by love. In a time when people seem to have lost their relationship with each other, when so many marriages are struggling or broken, when so many people are hurting or lonely, the question, "How can we know each other?" becomes important.

We know each other when we see through the eyes of love.

In the week to come, let us make an effort to see ourselves, to see other people, to see the world, and to see God through the eyes of love. Let us make an effort to see in the way that Jack sees Jill, the way that little handicapped boy sees that little handicapped dog--through the eyes of love. If we do this, we might be surprised at what we will discover.

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