

Sermon Notes for July 14th

We are going to spend the next 5 Sundays in the book of Hebrews. I call it a book, but in actuality it is a sermon. Next time you think one of my sermons is too long or a bit dry, please go and read Hebrews.

The author of Hebrews might be Apollos or Silas or Barnabas. The Greek is very sophisticated, but not in the same style as Paul. The basic driving metaphor for this sermon is that Jesus Christ is our great high priest and that Jesus was and is the perfect and final sacrifice for the sins separating humans from God.

Rather than utilize some textbooks to get to the details of this theological sermon, I have decided to bracket our short text with a couple of stories. The first story is from Lisa Harper, who wrote a book entitled, *Hebrews The Nearness of King Jesus*.

“When I was a senior in high school, the Saturday before prom, Mom asked me to clean under the eaves of our back porch. Remember how the dad in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* thought Windex could cure anything? Well, that’s how my mom feels about Clorox. She just loves the stuff. And the giant white blotches on all her shorts and t-shirts prove her addiction.

I kept daydreaming about prom..._ me in a shimmering white dress with spaghetti straps...a red rose wrist corsage...matching the smart red boutonnière he'd be wearing on his rented lapel.... hmmm, I bet those little wisps of peach fuzz on my upper lip would be absolutely invisible if I put some of Mom's industrial-strength bleach on them and let it soak awhile.

My upper lip was still swollen and scabby for prom night. And you can bet your bottom dollar I never confused Clorox with Sally Hansen Creme Hair Bleach again. You CANNOT SUBSTITUTE one for the other.

Some of the Hebrews were making a similar mistake, trying to substitute Moses for Jesus. But they soon learned that Moses, though a heroic leader, couldn't hold a candle to the Light of the World.”

Hebrews 1:1-4 (Voice)

1 Long ago, at different times and in various ways, God's voice came to our ancestors through the *Hebrew* prophets.

2 But in these last days, it has come to us through His Son, the One who has been given dominion over all things and through whom all worlds were made.

3 This is the One who—imprinted with God's image, shimmering with His glory—sustains all that exists

through the power of His word. He was seated at the right hand of God once He Himself had made the offering that purified *us from* all our sins. **4** This Son of God is elevated as far above the heavenly messengers as His holy name is elevated above theirs.

THIS IS THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD!

Thanks be to God! Amen.

In Hebrew, “in God’s image” is B’tselem Elohim - and the Jews who practice are supposed to be careful how to treat each other because of this concept. Erica Brown comments: “The worth of a person is not transactional: Who are you that I should pay attention to you? The better question to ask when we withhold our attentions is: Who am I that I should ignore you?”

Rabbi Moskowitz makes some points about God’s Mirror when he writes:

When does a child become self-aware?

When a child first sees himself in a mirror he touches the mirror. He does not know it is his reflection. Later, around the age of two, when the child looks in the mirror she instead touches her face. In that moment her self-

identity begins to take shape. The child says, “I.” Self-awareness begins to form.

In Hebrew “Ani” means “I.” There appears little self-awareness exhibited by Adam and Eve, who are unaware of their nakedness and blame each other, as well as God, for their own failings. There is plenty of “you” but no “I.” Cain and Abel are so lacking in introspection that they do not understand the pain they cause each other, leading to the first murder.

And then the “I” appears. Ani is first discovered in the story of Noah and the flood. It is God who first utters the word, Ani. “And God said to Noah and his sons with him, ‘I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come, and with every living thing that is with you...never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.’” (Genesis 9:8-11)

The Rabbi goes on to say that there is no (independent) “I.” There is only I-It or I-Thou. The “I” only exists in relation to another. Most of our relationships are utilitarian and therefore I-It. Some are I-Thou. It is these that offer a glimmer of the divine. In I-Thou there is a mutuality of care and concern. ‘All real living is meeting,’ Martin Buber observed. The “I” never exists alone. It can only be found in the promise of another.’

Is it possible that God can only be God in relationship with human beings? I wonder.

What if the entire Bible is not about us but instead about God? What if it is not about our search for God but instead God's quest for us and in that search, the discovery of God's own self-awareness? Abraham Joshua Heschel writes (in his theological treatise, *God in Search of Man*): "This is the status of the Bible in modern life: it is a sublime answer, but we do not know the question any more. Unless we recover the question, there is no hope of understanding the Bible." Perhaps the question is not ours, but God's. Perhaps the search is not our own. Heschel reminds us: it is instead God's search.

And God asks us again and again: why are you created?

I begin to recover, and reformulate, an answer.

We are fashioned to be God's mirror. We were created in God's image.

God is only God because of us.

God can only be God with us.

We are the mirror that God holds.

The questioning continues.

What is the image we wish for God to see?"

I am not as deep as the learned Rabbi - but I would make a point that God is not independent and therefore dependent upon us. God is in community within the Trinity - God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

But God does love us enough to let us agent with God. And so, in that regard, I agree with the statement that “we are the mirror that God holds.”

How much Jesus does God see?

How much Jesus do we see?

AND THAT’S THE MESSAGE!