

10-8-23

Sermon: How Does God See Me?

Scripture: Psalm 139:11-24, CTW: Isaiah 43:1-7

Hymns: 361, 362, 364

Theme: **"How does God see me?"** What kind of emotions does that question stir up for you? Joy? Confusion? Doubt? Fear? I'm afraid that for far too many of us, guilt and shame are strong responses—even for those of us who know and follow God. When we start thinking about God peering into our souls, we get a little uneasy or downright paranoid.

I. So, How Does Your Garden Grow?

Whether it is vegetables or flowers, there is something amazing about placing tiny dry seeds in the ground, covering them with earth and water, and then waiting for something to grow.

A. But have you ever tried to really grow a garden? It can be wonderfully rewarding, but it's also a lot of work. Watching and waiting for the first signs of those green miracles to push up through the dirt takes patience.

Then there's the watering and weeding and trimming and fertilizing and thinning. The more difficult moments of gardening come after the tender shoots have appeared.

And some of it seems counterintuitive: pulling up new growth and thinning things out to make way for mature growth. Without purposeful space, there is no room for other plants to grow and bear fruit.

Last week, we tackled the question "Where is God when I need Him the most?" We explored the paths of directing our honest questions to God and encountering Him during our pain. This week, let's explore the question "How does God see me?"

What kind of emotions does that question stir up for you? Joy? Confusion? Doubt? Fear? I'm afraid that for far too many of

us, guilt and shame are strong responses—even for those us who know and follow God. When we start thinking about God peering into our souls, we get a little uneasy or downright paranoid.

We don't want to let God in because we're afraid of what He might find there. Maybe we're afraid He'll be angry or punish us for the darkness lurking inside our hearts. Maybe we're afraid He can't really help or do anything about the hurt weighing us down inside. Maybe we're mad at Him, blaming Him for the pain we've experienced. Maybe it's a little bit of everything.

We can be a lot like Adam and Eve in **Genesis 3:8–10**:
“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.’”

But is it possible our perspective is wrong? Could it be that God sees beauty in our mess? That's what Mack saw in the movie, *The Shack*, when he viewed his garden...a mess!

II. A Beautiful Mess / A Different View

While on retreat I took the opportunity to watch the movie *The Shack* again. There is a scene, when Mack and Sarayu, the person representing the Holy Spirit, left the forest and walked into the garden. Mack called it “wild”, pushing aside all the blooming, tropical overgrowth. “Okay, it's a mess,” he confesses when Sarayu pushes him further.

To him, everything looks wild and overgrown. Beautiful, yes, but lacking any sense of order—at least any order he can see. But Sarayu is seeing things somehow differently. She agrees it is a mess, but says it is: “So beautiful!”

A. A Trip Back to the Original Garden:

Let's go back to that first garden, Eden, in **Genesis 1:1:27–28, 31**: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

These verses give us a view of God's original viewpoint. How did He see Adam and Eve? How did He view humanity? How does He view us? Good. Very good.

You might be thinking, *Yes, but that was before Adam and Eve disobeyed His rules and brought sin into the world.* That's true. Sin brought consequences, as it always does. It broke the perfect order God had created that included face-to-face unity with God, and it brought separation between a holy God and fallen man. But did it change God's view of us, the pinnacle of His creation?

Let's see what else the Bible in **Psalms 139:13-14**, shows us in answer to that: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!"

Then in **Isaiah 43:4**- "Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. "Did you catch those descriptors? Precious. Honored. Loved. These sound like the phrase God used in Genesis: "good, very good."

B. Jesus conveyed a similar perspective in Luke 12:6–7, talking about the detail and precision of God's care for His creations—us included: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the

very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

The apostle Paul later described God's lavish love for us this way: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" **1 John 3:1.**

Despite the mess we can often look like, God sees beauty in what He has created as you and me. When sin and evil brought a broken order to our world, God saw a need to restore things to what He intended. But He didn't stop seeing the goodness of what He designed and created. Instead, He put a plan in place and began the work of restoring and redeeming us—and all He had made—back to Himself, through the work of Christ.

Perhaps it's like a diamond in the rough, a buried treasure, a gemstone in need of polish, a fixer-upper, a garden in need of some TLC—pick your metaphor; the point is the same. When God sees you, He sees the beauty of what He created and what He wants to fully reveal to all. "So beautiful!" He says.

III. Are We Abiding in Christ?

A. How does God want to bring this beauty to bear? In relationship. Please own this as a truth for your life!

That's the way it all began in Eden. God visited and walked and talked with Adam and Eve face-to-face. But what was the lie **the serpent** sold the first couple? "Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (**Genesis 3:5**). At its core, the lie claimed that they didn't need God; they could be like God. They could do it all on their own. Their choice to swallow this lie drove a wedge into a perfect relationship.

Isn't this the same lie that we face every day? "You will be like God." In other words, you don't need God. You can judge what's right or wrong. You can follow the path that seems best or easiest or the most fun or convenient.

Maybe that will work for a while. But what happens when millions of people follow the **choices that feel best** to themselves? What happens when my right contradicts your right, my good opposes yours? Conflicts arise. Wars are waged. Brokenness multiplies exponentially.

This isn't how it was supposed to be.

B. Have you ever viewed your relationship with God as a conversation between friends? He desires an organic, living and breathing, constant life-giving relationship with us. It's an ongoing, intimate dialogue with Him as He helps us navigate the choices and challenges, we encounter. It's a resting reliance on His loving affirmation and healing presence in our pain and confusion. It's a willing trust in His ability to do what's best **in** us and **for** us.

Jesus offered us a beautiful garden-related metaphor of what this relationship can look like. It's abiding, remaining, and staying connected to our life-giving source and drawing everything we need from Him. In **John 15:1-4**, he said:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the words I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

C. We often view pruning as a painful process, don't we? We think of the cutting aspect. But in the context Jesus was using, does it hurt to cut off a dead branch? There is certainly a removal, but it is a clearing out of old, withered remains to make room for new growth.

Pruning may be painful sometimes, but not always. To use a more personal example, think about your hair and fingernails. We

cut our hair and trim our fingernails regularly without pain to allow them to grow more healthily. It's a process of regeneration.

Similarly, Jesus was talking about a regenerative process: remaining, abiding in Him, drawing nutrients and sustenance and life from Him so that fruit can naturally grow out of us.

IV. Key Concept: We Must All Focus on a Higher Vision.

A. God is inviting us into true, restorative relationship.

Jesus gave words to it like this: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (**Matthew 11:28–30**). **Words to live by!**

B. Understand this: God sees so much more clearly than we do. His perspective is eternity. His understanding is unlimited. We will never fully grasp the spiritual realities at work until we fully enter God's presence in heaven. But we can accept His invitation and trust that He is working to transform us from the inside out. Amen? Let Us Pray...