



*Seeing God*

*Colossians 1:15-23*

*1st in the sermon series "Knowing God"*

*Sunday, January 5th, 2020*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

*The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

*Text: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (v. 15)*

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A Sunday school teacher once asked her first grade class, "Where's God?"

The children raised their hands to respond. "Okay, Mary, where is God?"

"God is everywhere."

"Very good. God is *everywhere*."

"Michael, what do you think. Where's God?"

"God's inside of me!"

"That's also right, Michael. God is inside each one of us. Does anyone have a different answer?"

Danny raised his hand. "Danny, where do you think God is?"

"God's in our bathroom."

Surprised the teacher just had to ask, "Your bathroom?! Why do you say that God's in your bathroom?"

"Because every morning my father knocks on the bathroom door and says, "My God, are you still in there?!"

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God may be in Danny's bathroom. For most of us, though, the question "Where is God?" must be preceded by the question, "Who is God?"

A university student once made an appointment with the college chaplain. "I don't believe in God," he said to the chaplain. The chaplain sat in silence for a moment, letting the statement hang in the air. Finally the chaplain replied, "Tell me about the God you don't believe in. Maybe I don't believe in Him either."

Many years ago J. B. Phillips wrote a little book entitled Your God Is Too Small. In it he explored various ways in which Christians and Not-Yet-Christians portray God.

There's the:

**The Policeman God**, watching what you do and saying "Ah-ha, caught you!".

It is that small voice that makes us feel guilty or unhappy before, during, or after doing something wrong. This is mistaking God for our conscience. A conscience can be valuable in providing a moral guide but making a conscience into God is highly dangerous.

C. Ellis Nelson wrote in the little book Don't Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide, our conscience is heavily influenced by our culture and the way in which we were raised. For example, there is in many of us the voice of the "critical parent"; the finger wagging parent that instills a sense of shame in many of us.

Our conscience can also be influenced by our culture. Nowhere is there a better illustration than Nazi Germany where propaganda perverted the moral sense and instilled the hatred of Jews, gypsies, and others.

**There's God as "The Grand Old Man"**. Phillips noted that some Sunday School children were asked to write down their ideas as to what God was like. With few exceptions the answers began with something like "God is a very old gentleman living in Heaven..."

The problem with this notion of God is not that God is old, God is *old*; *God Always Was and Always Will Be. You can't get older than that!* No, the problem is that the Grand Old Man God seems "old-fashioned" and out of touch, irrelevant. Many of the Church's hymns were written in the Victorian times and, with very few exceptions, seem, while loved, out of touch with our actual lives. For example, take the hymn "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing". When is the last time you raised your Ebenezer? The words have beauty and dignity, but it is the beauty and dignity of a past time. (By the way, as a footnote, is an English transliteration of a stone that the Old Testament prophet Samuel raised as a monument to God's faithfulness, saying, "Here the Lord has helped us." An Ebenezer, then, is a rock of blessing.)

**There is the Bookkeeper**. This is the God who either sits behind a high desk with a ledger in front of him, putting down a white or black mark on the page that bears your name. If, at the time of death there are more white check marks than black, well then you're "glory bound". On the other hand, more black check marks than white means that you will become "a crispy critter."

Each of these understandings and others are misrepresentations of God.

When I used to regularly teach confirmation classes I would tell them that if they want to know who God is, all they needed to do is to simply look at Jesus. *Jesus is the visible manifestation of an invisible God.*

Our understanding of Reality is limited by time and space. Our minds are small. It is impossible for us to truly imagine "Forever" or "Infinity". We cannot imagine a Reality that has no beginning and no end. We cannot imagine what the "last" number is because numbers continue forever, both positive and negative numbers. The same is true of the square root of pi; no matter how many decimal points you go out there is always one more. Now, as a side not, if the pie is cherry, it goes into my belly!

So if we want to know what God is like, we need to look at Jesus and his teachings.

Jesus said that when you did it unto the least of God's children you have also done it unto him. God expects those of us who have much to do much; to accept more responsibility for the care of God's children.

Jesus once told a parable about how one needs to use the talents entrusted to them on behalf of the master. God is the master who expects the servants to be good stewards of that entrusted to their care.

Jesus told another parable about weeds being sown in a wheat field as an act of sabotage. When asked if the owner of the field wanted workers to pull the weeds, they were told "No; let them grow side by side with the wheat lest a single stalk of wheat be accidentally destroyed." God is the landowner who separates the good from the bad in the end.

Jesus told a parable about a master who paid the workers who labored only an hour the same wage as those who labored all day. When the cry "That's not fair" was raised, the employer asked why anyone would begrudge his generosity. God is that generous employer.

In yet another parable Jesus told about a father who waited patiently for a wayward child to come to his senses and return home. God is that patient father.

I could go on and on and on. But maybe the best lesson is at this Table that is set before us. On the last night that Jesus was with his disciples he said that the bread is his body, broken for you. And the cup is the cup of salvation sealed in his blood.

If you want to know what God is like, simply look to Jesus.

*He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God.*

To God be the glory.