

But We See Jesus
Genesis 1:26-31 Hebrews 2:5-9

Our next reading, as listed in the bulletin, is Hebrews 2:5-9. I'd like to read the opening three verses of the letter to the Hebrews because it adds substance to our reflection this morning, and brings a needed encouragement:

Hebrews 1:1-3

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

Hebrews 2:5-9

⁵Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶But someone has testified somewhere (that somewhere is Psalm 8), "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? ⁷You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, ⁸subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, ⁹**but we do see Jesus**, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

When you think of the world today, or our country, or what's going on around us in our towns and city, what comes to mind? What do you see? Think

about that for a moment... what do you see? In your mind's eye, and also with your physical eyes.

Kids returning to school reminded me of a book: Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?... ("I see a red bird looking at me; red bird, red bird, what do you see? I see a yellow duck looking at me..." and so on) I thought this week that it would be fun if someone wrote a book titled, "Christian, Christian, what do you see?" I know some Christians whose first page would say: "I see the world falling apart all around me." Well, that's one way to look at things!

The writer to the Hebrews says: "...but we see Jesus." I love that phrase: but we see Jesus. What this writer is saying is, in the midst of this world, where it looks like things might be falling apart, and maybe even heading for disaster, we see Jesus. We see Jesus ("who sustains all things"—there is our first hint of hope).

The writer first reminds us that when God created the earth and everything in it, and made it good (*very good*, actually) God put humans in it to take care of it, as we heard in the Genesis 1 reading. The Genesis 2 way of saying it is, we are to "tend the garden."

And the writer emphasizes that humans are crowned with glory and honor, quoting from the Psalm. Think of that. Crowned with glory and honor, you and I

are. Think of what a great affirmation that is from God. God trusts us with what he has made. God says, “Here—you who are crowned with glory and honor, take care of my world; I trust you with responsibly caring for everything.” That’s amazing. What a privilege; and... what a responsibility! And... how do you feel about the fact that you are ‘crowned with glory and honor’? That’s a magnificent statement. Perhaps we don’t feel that way, but that’s who God says you are: you are person made in God’s image, crowned with glory and honor. Let that sink in! Please take some time this week to meditate on that truth and what it means to you to be a magnificent creation of God.

Now, even with that being true, this writer says that humans haven’t done a very good job of taking care of the world. Things don’t seem under our careful and thoughtful, beneficial stewardship the way they are supposed to be, the way God designed it to be. Does that ring true to you? I’m sure we can all think of ways that careful and thoughtful beneficial “tending of the garden” so to speak has either eluded us, or, human selfishness and indifference have *created* distress in our world and our country: from poverty & homelessness to climate change, to racism, and our broken political process, and the like.

We don’t see things under our subjection as they ought to be, as the writer of Hebrews puts it.

The writer of Hebrews is honest that not everything is right in this world, or sometimes in our lives. And the writer doesn't attempt to make sense of the world and what's wrong. The author doesn't give us answers to the questions of why things go bad or attempt to explain things away.

What the writer *does* give us is new vision, and hope: "...but we *do* see Jesus." This is one of the great turn of phrases in the Bible. "As it is, we don't see everything under our subjection or control; *but we do see Jesus.*"

Things may not be in control the way God or we intended them to be. But we do see Jesus. To put this in our contemporary context, we could say:

We don't see covid under our control; but we do see Jesus.

We don't see cancer under our control; but we do see Jesus.

We don't see human thriving and equality under our control, but we do see Jesus.

We don't see (fill in the blank) under our control, but we do see Jesus.

We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, (in other words, human just like us) and is now crowned with glory and honor, the writer says, *because he suffered death.*" Because he suffered death. Not crowned with glory and honor because he solved all of the world's problems, cured covid, and there is

nothing wrong any more. Not crowned with glory and honor because he got rid of all bad people and now we don't have a care in the world.

Not even because he was raised from the dead. That's what I think it ought to say if I were reading this for the very first time—that he is crowned with glory and honor because he was resurrected to life at Easter. But it doesn't say that.

It says, "crowned with glory and honor *because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone*" (repeat). That's a very important idea to the Biblical writers, all the way to the end. In Revelation 5, for example, there is this vision of heavenly worship where everyone sings "worthy, worthy, worthy is Jesus, the lamb of God..." Why? Because he suffered death. Not because he's this mighty conqueror, but because he became human like us; to suffer what we suffer, *as we suffer*. He chose the path of weakness and humility. And that's such good news. Jesus is one of us. Jesus is no stranger to human pain and suffering, and he loves us in the midst of it when we experience it.

Jesus hasn't cured covid or cancer, but he is with every covid and cancer patient who is suffering.

Former member, years ago, was in a bad car accident that crushed his ribs on one side and left him with several other broken bones. He was taken by

ambulance to a Catholic hospital. As he was being wheeled from the ambulance into the emergency department, above the outside entrance was a crucifix.

Although he is protestant/Presbyterian and we don't normally portray Jesus on the cross as the Catholics do, he said it was the most comforting and reassuring thing, in his pain and distress and wondering if he was going to live or die, to see Jesus there, sympathizing with him in his pain and distress. Knowing that, even if he died, Jesus knew that experience. He said he felt the presence of Jesus like he'd never felt it before. Because Jesus is no stranger to suffering. Or to a world in turmoil!

Again, we don't see everything properly stewarded, to use our Presbyterian lingo; but we do see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of his suffering.

What it tells us is that we have hope. In the midst of the *world's* trouble, Jesus is present. In the midst of a troubled *nation* Jesus is present. And in the midst of our challenging *lives* Jesus is present, loving and blessing and reassuring us. He walks with us, he suffers with us. We can have hope.

And as we fix our eyes on Jesus, he gives us new vision for our lives and for the wider world—to see where he is present and where he is at work, and be encouraged by that. And even be invited to partner with him in his good work. Because... not everything is messed up. There is good, and God is at work doing

good. We just have to work a little harder to see it because it doesn't make headlines or appear very often in social media; and, our eyes/mind have been trained to see the bad. We have to find the good. As Fred Rogers often said: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping. '" And Fred Rogers *the minister* would add, that's where you'll see God at work.

The phrase "but we see Jesus" is actually an invitation to change what we are looking at—literally and figuratively. To change our vision; to change where we put our attention, and what we dwell upon. Because our tendency is to focus our attention on our problems, or the problems of the world, rather than on Jesus. It's natural for us to dwell on what's wrong in our lives or in the world. And if that's where I dwell, and that's all I think about, then that's what I've trained my eyes to see and it's what I *will* see. And then it becomes hard to have hope.

What the Biblical writers tell us is: don't focus on your problems or the world's problems, focus on Jesus—at least as a starting place. Take your problems to Jesus, but don't stare at your problems or obsess about them. Look at Jesus, look to Jesus. And let him put your problems, and the world's problems,

into proper perspective. And then adjust your vision to see the good, to see where he is at work.

A little later in Hebrews (chapter 12) the writer says this: *“Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us; let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross...”* It’s another way of saying basically the same thing—that Jesus suffered death, in solidarity with us. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.” Just like a runner doesn’t stare at the ground during the entire race but keeps her eyes fixed on a goal in front of her as she runs, we look to Jesus as we go through life.

This isn’t avoidance or turning a blind eye to problems, but a way to gain new vision, and to let Jesus give us wisdom and courage and perspective on them.

So, I’m anticipating the question: what does it mean to see Jesus? How do we see Jesus? Which is really the question, how do we *know* Jesus? Because the word “see” also means to know. It means to have a clear vision of something or someone, in the sense that I understand something or someone. “I see you” can also mean “I know you.” I get you. I understand. So, how do we see Jesus? How do we know, understand Jesus?

We see Jesus when we read and reflect on Scripture, which tells us who he is and what he does, and what he has said. .

We see Jesus when we quiet our minds and take time to pray, and listen— maybe even visualize in our minds that he is next to us, walking with us, or sitting next to us.

We see Jesus when we remember what he's done for us.

We can see Jesus when we look for the good, and find the good around us.

We see Jesus in the communion elements: his body given for you; his blood shed for you. Visible reminders of his love and his presence in your life.