

“What Is In the Mirror?”  
1 Corinthians 13:1-13  
Luke 4:31-37

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So, what do you see in the mirror? When you look in the mirror, do you see a likeness, perhaps to a parent, to a child, to a brother or sister? Do you see something you like, or as is often the case, something you don't like? Do you want to change something? What do we see in the mirror? Do we see more than just a one-dimensional image? Perhaps sometimes we want to see more in there. Don't you wish you could ask the mirror a question sometimes – mirror, mirror on the wall – or some such thing?

When we see in the mirror that one looking back at us, can we see the character of that one? Does the mirror reflect our character? Do we see a reflection dimly? When I think about 1 Corinthians 13, I wonder whether I am actually a reflection of all that Paul talks about there. I suspect that I'm more like a mirror that reflects dimly. That word for mirror that's used in 1 Corinthians 13 probably meant a piece of metal polished to act as a mirror. Now, it's pretty hard to get a piece of metal to reflect completely accurately. And even with glass, we know that you can create glass that distorts. I would guess that most of the time when we look in the mirror we don't quite see exactly what really is. And certainly looking in that piece of metal, we would see distortions. We see in the mirror, but we don't see fully.

What I recognize is that as I am a mirror of God, I reflect dimly. I don't see fully, I don't seem to reflect fully. What keeps me from being that reflection that I would like to be? Where is the dimness that enters in? At least one level of dimness that I find is what I've learned to be. Throughout my life there have been all kinds of things that I've worried about, that I've wondered about, that I've tried to fit together. We can list the kinds of things in our lives that really influence us. We could probably start with things like finances, jobs, relationships, families...we could probably keep going. We could begin to think about things wider: our community, our nation, our world, the events occurring at these levels of human society. I begin to try to deal with all of those things in particular ways, and when I deal with those things in particular ways, I try to hold on to the ways that I think work. I particularly find that at times I have held on to something that once worked but doesn't seem to continue to work. There's a way in which, in light of all the things I have to worry about, and all the ways the world is, and all the chaos I see around me, I like to have things that work consistently, the same way. I think that one of the things I do is try to create a world that has that consistency, that feels safe, where I don't have to worry about all those things. But in doing that, what do I do? I create barriers. I dislike having to change

particular things in my life. That can set my reactions and behaviors and even my thinking in particular ways. I would suggest that some of those ways end up getting in the way of my relationship with God. They create a dimness in my life because of the way I've set it and I don't want to change.

It's interesting that when Jesus confronts this man in the synagogue with the unclean spirit, it's an unclean spirit. The word there is not an evil spirit. This suggests it's simply something that gets in the way of the relationship the man could have with Jesus or with God. The image that came to my mind is what would it be like if on Sunday morning I came in here directly out of the garden with my boots still muddy, my hands muddy, my knees muddy. It wouldn't be appropriate. We might worry about the carpet. You wouldn't expect me to come in here all muddy to get up and preach and to participate in the service. That mud is a barrier of sorts to being here. It's not bad. Mud's not bad. In fact in a lot of ways, it's really good. But it can get in the way at particular times. It's not necessarily appropriate for me to be all muddy up here. It might get in the way. That's what Jesus is doing, is saying to the man, "You've got something in the way; let's get it out of there."

It's interesting, the man's response. Now we're not going to go into how he knows who Jesus is, but notice his response of, "What do you have to do with me?" Sometimes I think that's my response to Jesus as well. I hope it's the kind of response that's more like, "What would you have me do? How would you like to be in my life?" But I'm afraid it's sometimes more like the response of the fellow here. "What do you have to do with me?" as a way of pushing away. And, it's a lot easier to tell Jesus what I want Jesus to do in my life than to have Jesus tell me what I might do with my life. It sometimes, in fact, makes me a little nervous to think about what Jesus might do in my life. It's true. Sometimes Jesus takes us to places we don't expect and where we don't always want to be. I never dreamed I would be up here preaching. Sometimes you follow Jesus into places you don't expect to go.

But we do have a sense of where Jesus will take us, even when we're nervous about the change that Jesus may make in our lives, the transformation, the way Jesus will change us, the spirits that Jesus will drive out of our lives. We have some clues about where he's going to take us. That's why we've been looking at the fruits of the Spirit. We have a clue about where Jesus is taking us. Paul talks about how the Spirit works in our lives, the fruit that begins to be shown, and we have a clue about where Jesus will take us. We don't always know the exact route he will use to take us there. We don't always know the future before us, but we do have some idea of the colors that might be there, for example. The fruit that we might produce.

Today's fruit are goodness, or generosity as the NRSV translates it, and faithfulness. First, we notice that it is the generosity and faithfulness of God that gives us Jesus. Even when we feel that struggle about the change he calls us to, we know that it's a good change, that God's gift is a good one. Generosity. The older translations simply translate it as goodness, but it's about a character of giving goodness. That's why the newer translation, NRSV, changed to generosity, because it's freely, willingly giving of goodness. That goodness can take all kinds of forms. We can give a helping hand, we can give financial support, we can give emotional support—there's all kinds of goodness, isn't there. But generosity is freely, willingly given goodness, like Jesus, freely, willingly given to us. God's love for us. That's generous.

And faithfulness. Again, the greatest model is God. God's faithfulness across the centuries is that he always worked with his people, continued to come to them, continued to work on that relationship, wanting it to happen, being trustworthy in the midst of it. The other way you can translate faith is trust, or in this case, trustworthiness. Faithfulness, trustworthiness. It's the same for us, then. As we follow Jesus, we get to live into being faithful, trustworthy.

What is it to be trustworthy in a relationship? One of the things I thought about how it looks to be trustworthy is that we don't disregard the other, we don't disinherit, we don't dismiss, we don't disenfranchise – basically we don't dis the other, right? When you're in a relationship with somebody that's trustworthy, you know they're not going to dis you in any of those dis words. No wonder there is the slang word "dis." We can see where Jesus is leading us, to freely, willingly show goodness and to be trustworthy.

One time when I was visiting a nursing home a person who was pretty ill looked up at me and said, "I'm sorry, I'm not good for much right now." I thought, why would you think I was asking you to be good for something? It helped me see in that person how they were looking out. They weren't thinking about where they were at, they were thinking about the world around them, even in the midst of a serious illness. It made me think, how often do I look around and think, "What am I good for? Who am I good for?" Isn't that the beginning of generosity? The interesting thing is that if we turned that around what I recognize is that God never says, "You are good for nothing." God always says you're good for someone, something, you've always got some good you can do. You're never good for nothing. You're always good for something, someone. That's following Christ, is to recognize that we are good for something and that we can freely and willingly give of our goodness and that we can be trustworthy, learn not to dis others.

So that's where we're called. It's a recognition that it may be that we don't always see everything clearly or reflect God's grace fully, that we recognize a dimness in our own lives, yet it is as we allow Christ to call out those spirits that are unclean in us, change us, move us to be different or to encourage others, we begin to brighten the world a bit, to change that dimness both in our own lives and the lives of those around us because we know the brightness of Christ, the grace of God.

So we have prayers this week about being able to see clearly how we might be generous, good for others, how we might be trustworthy.

Morning Prayer: Dear Lord, help me see clearly what or who I can be good for. Holy Spirit lead me to be generous and faithful in my life today. Through Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, I pray. Amen.

Evening Prayer: Gracious Lord, remind me of the good in my life and your faithfulness this day. Through this night's rest, equip me with generosity and faithfulness for the new day. Through Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, I pray. Amen.

We can think about that both in the morning and at night through our week so that we, too, can let Jesus remove those unclean spirits in our lives and begin that work of letting the fruits of the Spirit grow and develop and be produced in us. Now I say begin because it often feels like it's a beginning in me. I'm thankful in knowing all of you, in whom I already see those fruits being produced, and I feel that we're called to encourage one another, to allow Jesus to continue to transform us, that the brightness of God drives the dimness away. Amen.