

## Mirror, Mirror

I have a strange question for us to think about this morning. Who are you and how do you know that you are who you think you are? There are several ways we gather information about who we are. Last Sunday I said that learn about ourselves by using a process similar to sonar. We send signals out to the people around us and get signals back. As this process is repeated over time we construct a composite picture of ourselves that is based on how we are viewed by others. For example, I might think of myself in a certain way because of the feedback I get from you, from my professors at seminary, from fellow pastors, and leaders in our denomination. And one way you might understand who you are is by the feedback you get from friends, co-workers, bosses, neighbors, etc. Our self image and self esteem are often and to a large extent formed in this way.

Another, and much earlier way we come to understand who we are is by the input of our families, particularly our families of origin. From the time we were born and even before we were born our mothers and fathers shaped our identity. Hopefully, we were dearly loved and warmly welcomed into the wombs of our mothers and greatly celebrated when we made our appearance into the world. Hopefully we were cherished and carefully nurtured by our mothers and fathers and by our grandparents. Hopefully, if we had older siblings, they welcomed us into their family. Hopefully as children we came to see ourselves as desirable, capable, significant, and greatly loved. Hopefully, it was communicated to us that we are each a precious gift bringing joy to all who know us.

Of course, this is not always the case. Perhaps some of us were told that we were conceived by accident and it was communicated to us that we were perceived as a burden to an already financially strapped family. Perhaps our parents were not physically, mentally, or spiritually well enough to be loving. Perhaps our older siblings resented us for taking attention away from them. Perhaps one of our parents died or our parents were divorced when we were children and we always thought it was our fault. Perhaps we had parents who disciplined us by shaming, demeaning, and otherwise abusing us. Perhaps we were made to believe that we were unwanted, unwelcomed, evil, and unlovable. These are sad but all too real possibilities. For good or for ill we have come to understand who we are by the input given us by our families of origin.

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A third source of input that shapes our understanding of who we are, particularly in modern times, is that of the public media which speaks for the culture that surrounds us. Movie stars and rock stars, professional athletes, fashion models, politicians, and the rich and famous who we see on television are all mirrors into which we look and gather information about who we are and who we are not in comparison. The images we draw of ourselves based on such comparisons are almost always unflattering and negative. We are never as popular, talented, beautiful, powerful, wealthy, or famous as the people we see on television. I also think this is why many of us secretly rejoice when these figures get into trouble or fall. When they go down, it tends to make us feel better. Maybe we don't have to be so perfect to be valuable?

But who are we really? And, how are we to know who we are? Is it dependent upon and locked in according to the information we got from our families of origin? Is it to be determined by the feedback to the signals we send out to the people around us? Is it the image that comes back to us as we compare ourselves to the idealized and doctored images that come to us through our television sets? How are we to know who we are?

One very important truth we need to latch onto here is that if we are not going to be misled or miss led, we need to be suspicious of the information we gather from those around us and particularly from the public media. We even need to be suspicious about some of the information we got from our parents. The truth is that we have been lied to and are being lied to all the time about who we are. The Scriptures tell us that there is an evil and destructive spirit in this world otherwise known as the devil, who often masquerades as an angel of light. Ephesians 2:2 in the KJV of the Bible calls him "the prince and power of the air." In other words, he is all around us. John 8:44 tells us that this evil spirit is "a liar and the father of lies," an enemy to be defeated by Christ. Revelation 12:10 celebrates his ultimate destruction, "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.'" And while the victory of Christ and the demise of the devil are sure, they are not yet complete. Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil

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in the heavenly realms." The war between the truth of who we are and the false accusations that come from the devil is still being waged, and we are all a part of this battle. The devil wants to keep us in the dark, wants us to believe his lies about who we are and who we are not. The Lord wants to bring us to the knowledge of the truth.

Do you realize that the Bible tells us who we are? In fact, we might be quite surprised by what the Bible says about who we are and who we are becoming. First of all, the Bible tells us that we were created in the image of God; created not good, but very good, and that we were created to rule on earth. Genesis 1:26-28 say, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" This is who and what we were made for.

And yes, I know about the fall of man as described in Genesis 3 and all about the doctrine of total depravity spoken of by Calvin. I know that the human race has disobeyed God and defaced the image of God within it time and time again. But that doesn't change the fact that we were created in the image of God, to reflect the glory of God. That doesn't change the fact that God's design for us is very good and that He still desires us to rule on earth. Even in the long dark days between the fall of man in Genesis 3 and the redemption of man provided for in the cross of Christ, David says, in Psalm 139:13-14, "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, I know that full well." Psalm 8:4-6 say, "what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet."

Whatever else I might know about each of us here this morning, I say this with absolute confidence:

We are wonderfully made. In our innermost being we are awesomely and wonderfully made. Our potential is breathtaking. That's why the devil needs to lie to us about who we are; once we wake up to who we are and see who we can become in Christ, the devil's defeat will be complete and he will lose all power over us and his ability to create chaos in this world will be ended.

C. S. Lewis, Author of Mere Christianity and The Tales of Narnia, writes: "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization - these are mortal and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit . . . . Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses." Thomas Merton writes, of us, "If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed... I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other. "

What I am interested in getting across to all of us this morning is that when Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, He did not go through all of that just to forgive us our sins and enable us to go to heaven when we die. He also died and rose again and sent the Holy Spirit to restore the Image of God within us. Romans 5:17-19 in the New Living Translation of the Bible says, "For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous." Christ came to overturn and to reverse the curse of the fall and to empower all who believe in Him to live once more as the children of God and as wise and loving guardians of this beautiful world God has made.

What this means is that when we receive Christ as our Savior and submit to the rule of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are reborn as new creations. From God's perspective, we are restored to the dignity, beauty of spirit, and authority that we were designed to have from the beginning of time. The devil

wants to keep us blinded to this truth. He wants to question God's love, accuse us of being unworthy of such honor, keep us enslaved by every negative message and false judgment we have ever received about who we are in the eyes of the world. God wants to set us free.

James 1:23-25 paint it this way: "Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does." Mirror, Mirror, what do you see when you look in the mirror? And whose mirror are you looking into? The Devil holds up his mirror and shows you all your flaws. Jesus holds up his mirror and shows you what you look like forgiven, cleansed, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Which image will you believe and receive? Which image will you live by?

II Corinthians 3:18 says, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. Ephesians 2:4-7 tell us the truth about who we are, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

I would suggest that it is not for us to argue against what God says about us--as the word says, "let God be true and every man a liar" (Romans 3:4); rather, it is for us to believe and live into the truth that God has spoken over us. I John 3:2-3 say, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

## The Fourth Street Church of God

4thstcog.com

2001 Fourth Street  
Altoona, PA 16601  
942-1007/946-4110

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### Mirror, Mirror

**James 1:23-25;  
II Corinthians 3:12-4:1**

Jon R. Neely, Pastor