

Psalm 19

19:1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

19:2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

19:3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

19:4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

19:5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

19:6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;

19:8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes;

19:9 the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

19:10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

19:11 Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

19:12 But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

19:13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

MESSAGE – When Jesus Holds up a Mirror

Ever have one of those mornings when you look in the mirror and wonder where did “that” come from? Maybe it’s a gray hair, a pimple, dark circles under the eyes, a double chin? I had one of those mornings recently and I turned on the brighter light....that was a mistake! I turned it off again. That seemed to be better.

Like if I ignore it, it goes away, right?

Mirrors seem to be a certain kind of truth-teller. And sometimes I just don’t want to look.

But facing an aging or tired face is a piece of cake compared to when we have to face other truths; when we have to look in a different kind of mirror; a mirror that shows us the condition of our heart. Which seems to be what Jesus does in our story today. Let’s listen:

Matthew 21:33-46

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.

When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves,

more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls." When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

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Jesus tells this story to the religious leaders of his day – chief priests and Pharisees. He tells this story at the point when tensions are rising – we would consider it during that last week; what we call holy week...after the triumphant entry into Jerusalem and before the last supper.

The religious leaders have begun quizzing Jesus

Asking him where his authority came from

They were looking for a way to shut down the Jesus thing that was going on.

And in the midst of the back and forth, Jesus tells this parable to them

In essence he holds up a mirror to them so they can see themselves

And he holds up a familiar mirror

It's a parable built around imagery they would have been familiar with: Isaiah 5

Planted a vineyard, built a winepress and a watchtower

Isaiah used the imagery to tell how the purpose of the vineyard was not achieved: there were wild grapes (uneatable, useless fruit) ....the Israelites of his day were wild grapes and the gardener was left with figuring out how to replant the vineyard for the purpose of fruitfulness.

Isaiah's parable indicates that the plantings are faithless

Isaiah held up that mirror to the people of his day.

Jesus held up a similar mirror to the people around him.

Jesus' parable serves as a mirror to illuminate the faithless of those religious leaders....that they won't give to the owner the fruit owed to the owner.

What is the fruit owed to the owner?

The woes in Luke 11 seem to indicate the failings of the religious leaders of the day

- Confession:** Observe washing rituals but failed at looking inside to see what needed to be cleaned
- Good works:** Show extreme faithfulness to tithing (even down to the herbs) but neglect care for the poor
- Humility:** They loved the seats of honor – prideful
- Mercy:** They load people down with rules and regulations but don't help people carry them

They were in charge – but not faithful

They assumed their roles – but they missed the mission

So the parable serves as a sort of mirror.

They see the issue first. They understand what's going on first. Then they realize that what they are seeing is themselves.

The prophet Nathan did this as well to King David....told a story in which David saw the problem before he was able to see that he was the problem.

It's easy to look at those religious leaders of that day and click our tongues at them....how could they not see their faithlessness?

But let's face it – it's easier to not.

To just turn the bathroom light off and step away from the mirror.

It's easier to ignore it, to not confess our sins

It's easier to put up defenses, deny and discredit than to really take a look in the mirror.

But a close look in the mirror is absolutely crucial for the health of the spiritual life...which the religious leaders refused to do.

Maybe we are tempted to not look at well.....

But it's not a mirror meant to bring condemnation, but truth

It's a mirror that *helps* us

It's a mirror of grace....in our Methodist tradition we use the words prevenient grace...the ways God gets us to see our sin and brokenness so that we turn to God.

I believe Jesus tells those religious leaders not to get one up on them, but to offer them an opportunity to repent.

The mirror brings us to realization

Which hopefully leads to repentance

And repentance brings us healing

For a whole new life.

And we get to choose:

To see and change and step into that new life with Christ

Or we turn the light off and ignore what we see in the mirror.

Sometimes we turn the light off on the mirror by not reading the Bible...

Sometimes we turn the light off by not opening our hearts like it says in Psalm 19...let the meditation of my heart be acceptable unto thee.

Sometimes we turn the light off and refuse to look by becoming highly defensive of our actions and attitudes.

I'm here to personally tell you today that turning the light off doesn't help. It didn't help those religious leaders of long ago draw closer to God.

Has God been trying to show you something in your life that you don't want to see?

It's okay to look....for there's new life in looking. Jesus is there.

### **Isaiah 5:1-7**

5:1 Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

5:2 He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

5:3 And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

5:4 What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

5:5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

5:6 I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and

thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

5:7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!