

As We Are: See What Jesus Sees

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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This is the first week of a brand-new series called *As We Are*, and it is all about looking at the world in a way that is realistic. Now, we just said, “This is the Gospel of our Lord,” and that did not really feel like a gospel, did it? It felt like something else. But we are going to get there. I am going to show you how that works. This series is all about trying to understand *Grace*, trying to understand the depth and the richness of grace as it relates to you, as it sinks into your heart and mind and soul, but also as you look out into the world and you see people all around you who think differently than you do, who have different experiences than you, who many times you cannot understand what they are thinking. There is still grace for them.

Now, I am going to play this card one more time. It is the “I am new here” card. All right. So, I just came here, and I grew up in Chicago. And today, I heard, is a big day in Chicago. It is a day when football season starts. And so, I know that growing up, I was on the right side of everything, because I grew up cheering for the Chicago Bears because that is the appropriate team to cheer for. That is what everybody did. That is just how it was. But there were these other people who...I do not know what happened to them in their childhood, but they learned to cheer for the Green Bay Packers. Like I said, I do not know what happened to them, and why they are this way. I am quite mystified. But they are different than me. I do not understand where they have come from, or how they got there, but they cheer for this other team.

Now, that seems silly, because sports are entertainment. It is fun, right? But we have taken those same ideas, and those same mentalities, and that same philosophy, and transplanted those into many other areas of our lives, whether we intended to or not. And one of the new things that I get to, I am still new here, is learning about this really amazing county that we now live in. And before I got here, I learned a lot about it. So, how do

you learn about things these days, kids? Google, right? Google. So, you Google, you search all these things, and I find out that Loudoun County has the highest median household income in the country. In the country. That is amazing. Is that news to you? Did you know that? It is unbelievable. It also has, when you look at the school system, the number of graduates and where they go to college and all this, the school system here is like in the top 10th in the nation. It is amazing. It is probably even higher than that. Also, when I got here, I realized that a lot of the people that work and live around here have really incredible careers, jobs, pathways, and places that they have come from. I have gotten to know people who have done things that I could have never imagined—if they were allowed to tell me what they did at all. With the amount of opportunity that we have in this county, with the education that we provide our children and our youth, and the opportunities that we all have as adults to pursue our callings and our passions, this seems like an incredible place to live. It seems like kind of a, dare I say, like a perfect place to live.

Sounds really, really good, doesn't it? Google can tell you some good things, and then Google can tell you some other things, too. Google also told me that in our school system, we have been having a lot of divisions. There has been a lot of fighting. There have been a lot of battles. And the community has been split apart. It also tells me that even though we see this high household income, there are still many, and many, and many, many organizations that help people in need who live right here. It is just more hidden than in other places. And every week, the more, the longer I live here, the more people I meet who come to me who are wondering what they are called to do with their lives. "What am I supposed to do next? Where am I supposed to go? I am not sure that I really am called to be doing what I am doing currently."

You see, we have this tendency to look at our lives and this world in this idealized way. Because it feels good. It looks good. It makes us seem good to others, in this idealized, perfect, almost like a Garden of Eden way, when in reality, what are we really facing? There is also this real world that is completely opposite to that. In this series, what we are

going to try to do is to help us recognize that both of these exist. However, what God is calling us to do is to see ourselves, to see others, and to see the world with this realistic set of eyes: seeing people, ourselves, as we are. Because through that, Jesus can transform us through His grace and do incredible things for His kingdom.

So, the basic problem that we are really looking at is we have misunderstood somewhere along the way human nature. What are humans all about? What are we supposed to do? What is our capacity? What are we able to do? I think one of the things that was helpful in forming these thoughts was a new book called *Low Anthropology* by David Zahl. And the basic idea of the book is that in modern American culture, we have put up a whole bunch of ideas in our culture that are aspirational. They are looking at us as we want to be, and the expectations that we place upon ourselves and upon others do not actually give us what we think they are going to do. If they are supposed to give us freedom, they actually entrap us in a prison. Instead, we can look at the world in a different way. We can look at it in this more realistic way, in a way that is more difficult for us to come to grips with who we are. But it is the reality. And it is scriptural. In this way, we see Jesus' grace at work in a much, much greater way.

So, in this book, David says how we view human nature has a tremendous bearing on the way we experience the world and the way that we experience our relationships around us. That seems like a big, you never think of, "What are my main philosophical points about human nature and the world, and I am going to let that really make its way into my life, and, and I am going to work on those each and every day." We do not do that, do we? But it is true. Our overarching ideas about what people are capable of, or what they should be doing, and what our expectations are, shape our, even our closest, most intimate relationships.

So, here is what he says. And here is what I think we see in our world, that we tend to look at people, ourselves included, as we want to be. We look at it in an idealized version. Through these lenses, we think that I am limitless, that I am in control, that I get to decide what is good. Now,

I do not know if I wake up in the morning and say these things, but in some of the things that we teach to others, we say that we believe this.

What are some of the things that we teach our children about limits? At the very beginning, what do we say to them when we are trying to help them understand what they can do and be in the world? What do we say you can be? Anything you want to be, right? You can do anything you want to do. That is encouraging. It is hopeful. At different points in our lives, we need to hear that from people when we are struggling, trying to figure out what to do, and we need to take that next hard step to really get where God is calling us to be. We need that. But is it true?

What about the next one? I am in control. Do any of you guys that self-identify as People who like to have control? You do not have to raise your hands, it is okay. Do not point at people next to you, do not elbow them. I do not want to get anybody in trouble in the car ride home, it is okay. But we all know other people, other people, who need to have control of their situations. We can see that speck in somebody else's eye, right? But what about us? I would bet each one of us has different areas in our lives where we feel like we need to be in control, where if we do not have things just so, we really cannot sleep at night. We might drive the people that we love crazy with the things that we need to be in control of. This is as we want to be. We want things to be just so.

The last one is really interesting. I get to decide what is good. Does this make sense to you? Do you hear this in the world today? Does each person get to decide what is good and what is true? Are we able to tell other people what is good or true? I do not know how that works anymore. It is different than it used to be. "You be you," right? Have you heard people say that? I think that is gone out of fashion now. Maybe I am dating myself. But it is just you who gets to decide whoever you are, whatever you want to do, it is just for you. This also kind of tends to hit us when we are in an argument with somebody. And we take on a position that we just argue and argue and argue, and we realize at the end that what we were arguing for was just our preference. Or something that we did in our lives that we were trying to justify ourselves by saying, "This is the way I like it. This is the way I have experienced it. So, you

should experience it that way too.” Like, “Why in the world are there Green Bay Packers fans?” We should just get rid of that because that makes no sense to me. There is no reason to be that. I get to decide what is good. When we look at the world, people, and ourselves, as we want to be, we hold them up to this standard at which, if we were able to do all these things, would this be amazing? This would be really, really good. We would feel really great about this. If we could do these things.

However, I think we all know that There is a little lie hidden in each of these. That they do not all quite work out the way that we think they are going to. And this goes all the way back to the beginning of our story. The human story. Back to the Garden of Eden with the very first two human beings that God created, Adam and Eve. In the Garden, God said, “You are my people. You are my people. I am going to walk with you. I am going to talk with you. We are going to do all these things together. I have given you some work to do that you’re going to love.” Adam and Eve, from the beginning, had this work, this calling that they loved, these things they did every day that were just part of who they were, part of their calling from God. They had this perfect relationship. And God said, “Do not eat from this one tree, because it has fruit with the knowledge of good and evil. Just do not do it.” So, what did they do? What do we know about human nature? We know this now because this is pervasive. This is. This happens today. They went, and they ate the fruit. The lie was, “If you eat this fruit, you can be like God.” I do not think any of you here today have said that out loud. I do not think most people say that out loud. But sometimes in the things that we assume about ourselves, we assume that we can be like God. This is what we call original sin.

There was this original sin with Adam and Eve, wanting to be like God and disobeying. But this sin has been brought into every generation, all people, everywhere, throughout all time. This temptation to want to be like God, it is not always the same. It is not always a snake or whatever tempting people. But it comes through in different ways. And we see today that this is how it comes through. Besides, when we look at our idealized version of who we want to be, what do we actually see? We see

that what we are asking of others and ourselves is to be like God. Who is limitless? Who is in control? Who decides what is good and true?

So, maybe this was just a back-then problem. We do not do this today, do we? It was still active in Jesus' day. As He went around and talked to the people, we get to this part of Matthew chapter 7 where He says to the people who are wondering, "How am I supposed to live my life? What is the kingdom of God all about?" And He says, "How can you all say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a big plank in yours? You hypocrite! First, take the plank out of your eye, then you'll see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." When we want to be like God, when we look at the world as we want it to be, we put on expectations of people that put them in prison. They can never live up to them. They can never possibly meet your expectations. And Jesus calls us out. You hypocrites, it is not just them. It is you, too. And this might be the hardest thing about original sin. It is easy to see it in everybody else. It is hardest to admit it to ourselves.

If we see the world as we are, we understand that original sin is real. Our misunderstanding of human nature stems from this. It stems from our reluctance to recognize the reality of original sin. In a world where original sin does not exist, we are limitless. We are good, and we can decide that for ourselves, and we are in control of our destinies. But in a world where sin exists, we cannot possibly be that or do that. Instead, we look at ourselves and the world as we are realistically.

So, realistically, number one, I have limits. Do any of you work 90-hour weeks at some point? 100? 110? How many weeks in a row do you do this? You do it for a week, maybe two, maybe three, maybe four. Are you slowing down by five? How are six and seven going for you? We have limits.

Number two, I am not in control. This is a hard thing to say out loud, too, and be honest about. But I would bet that there has been a time in your life where everything has felt like it is out of control, where you were not in control of the things that you thought you were, and this reality hits you like a ton of bricks. This is reality. We are not in control.

The third one brings us really back into ourselves. Can you admit, can you say out loud, I am broken? Or do we always puff ourselves up? Do we always want to think and see and feel and act? And especially in this area, sometimes you got to have the right stuff and the right clothes and the right car and the right house and the right address and the right neighborhood. But are we all broken? Are we all broken?

When we look at ourselves and the world as we are, we see the reality of original sin in this world. But when we do that, it is not like we do not have hope. There is hope here. There is something in the reality of our situation that brings us into this place to worship this God who is so incredible and loves us so much. Jesus knew this. He spoke it to the same people. He said, “Look, all of you come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden—and I added these words in here. These are mine. All you imposters, you pretenders, you original sinners. This is me. This is you. This, these are your neighbors. Come to Jesus—and I [Jesus] will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” You see, it is not that we must shy away from the reality of our situation. It is just that we must see that Jesus is the answer, that He is the one who walks with us, next to us, as we are, not as we pretend to be, or as we want to be. He walks with us as we are.

So, how does this change things for you? I hope it allows you to see that, exactly what Paul said, “While we were still weak.” Is anybody here weak? Nobody wants to raise their hand to this, right? But we are broken. We are weak. While we were still weak. Christ died for us. Not once we got better, not once we became perfect, because you all know, when you come to church, you’re going to sit next to people in this pew who are perfect, right, who have their lives together, who did not fight here on the way, on the car ride here with their family. None of that. We are all perfect—Do I need to say that this is sarcasm? It is obvious that I am laying this on thick here. We are not perfect, and Christ dies for us. Now, some of us might consider dying for a righteous person or a really, really good person, but none of us are there. In the middle of our sin, God shows His love for us by dying for us, by rising again, and by

giving us this hope that we do not deserve. That is grace. That is God's riches at Christ's expense. That is grace for us.

Over the course of this series, we are going to dig into this much, much more. And I hope that you see that when we choose to take on the reality of the world, the reality of human nature in ourselves and in others, as we are instead of as we want to be that it allows us to really be free. No longer are we in this prison of expectations and disappointment and shame and guilt. Instead, Jesus comes to us as we are and says, "I love you. In all those things that you have done that are wrong, you have confessed them, and I forgive you. Now go and help others see me more clearly." Over the next few weeks, we are going to dig into each of these in turn, talking about our limits, talking about the issues that we have with control, digging into the ways that we are broken, and seeing how as we take on realistic perspectives, it changes who we are. And honestly, it changes the whole world. Is not this the kind of world that we want to live in, the kind where kindness, grace, joy, peace, and love are the things that we see and experience each-and-every day? This is what we want. Pretending to be who we are not will not get us there. Understanding who we are, understanding how much God loves us, and the grace that He gives to us to bring into this world...That is the kingdom of God at work.

Let's close in prayer. *Heavenly Father, we thank You for being with us today, for leading us, for guiding us, for opening our hearts and minds to hearing that You love us, even in the middle of our brokenness. You have come to save us, to give us hope, to give us a future, to give us Your grace that we can then use in this world to help other people see Your goodness and grace as well. Allow us these weeks to really ponder this, to take it to heart, and put it into practice, so that more and more people will see how much you love them, how much Jesus has given for them, and how much he gives to them with his grace. All this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*