**How Does God See Me?**

**FBC Albemarle**

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During the first night in the shack after encountering the Trinity, Mack had the nightmare that he has had many times since the fateful day his daughter was taken and murdered. He woke up angry, still unable to reconcile the pain and the guilt he had been carrying since that day. In the movie, Mack becomes angry with God at the breakfast table and is about to walk back to the truck to go back home. He had enough.

As he was on the way out, Mack encounters Sarayu and she is able to convince Mack to check out the garden she had been working in. As the two of them walked into the garden, Mack couldn’t help but comment on the state of affairs in the garden. “Wild,” Mack tries to say, pushing aside the blooming, tropical overgrowth. When Sarayu pushes him to say what he was really thinking, Mack replies “Okay, it’s a mess.” To him everything looked wild and overgrown. Beautiful, yes, but lacking any sense of order—at least any order he can see. But Sarayu sees things differently. She agrees it is a mess but “so beautiful,” she says admiringly.

Last week, we tackled the question “Where is God when I need Him the most?” We explored the paths of directing our honest questions to God and encountering Him in the midst of our pain. This week, we explore the question ”How does God see me?”

When we read the creation story from Genesis 1, we see God’s incredible power and creativity. We see that God created the universe with order and purpose. Everything in it had a special role to play in creation, including humanity. Both male and female were created in God’s own image. Verse 28 says that God blessed them (male and female). After creating Adam and Eve, God gave them several tasks. “Be fruitful and multiply... Rule over the fish of the sea, birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Humans had dominion over all things created and when God looked over all he had made, he considered it VERY good.

These verses give us a view of God’s original viewpoint. How did He see Adam and Eve? How did He view humanity? How does God view us? Good. Very good. You might be thinking, *Yes, but that was before Adam and Eve disobeyed His rules and brought sin into the world.* That’s true. Sin brought consequences, as it always does. It broke the perfect order God had created that included face-to-face unity with God, and it brought separation between a holy God and fallen humanity. But did it change God’s view of us, the pinnacle of His creation?

We think God sees us the way we see ourselves when we look in the mirror and search deep within. But is it possible our perspective is wrong? Could it be that God sees beauty in our mess, just like Sarayu did in the garden?

 I believe God sees us as a beautiful mess rather than a hopeless cause. To Mack, everything looked wild and overgrown. Yet, in the movie, when the perspective changed from what was right in front of him to a wide panoramic shot, the big picture was filled with order, purpose and beauty.

 When God looks at us, he sees us from a different perspective than we see ourselves. We judge ourselves by our accomplishments, by how others see us, by what the world tells us. But, God looks at us his sons and daughters: as his greatest creation. Yes, we are a mess but it is a mess that God is able to work for the good of those who love him. God sees beauty in what he has created in you and me.

 In his book *The Good and Beautiful God*, James Bryan Smith suggests one of the false narratives Christians tend to hold on to is the identity that we are “sinners saved by grace.” However, the true narrative is that as a follower of Jesus, our identity is that of a saint. Our narrative should be “In Christ I am no longer identified by my sin. I have been reconciled. Sin has been defeated.” 2 Corinthians 3:17 remind us “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” We have been set free from the bondage of sin and we are now saints in God’s kingdom. We are a beautiful mess whom God loves.

 How does God want to bring this beauty to bear? In relationship, of course! That’s the way it all began in Eden. God visited and walked and talked with Adam and Eve face-to-face. But what was the lie the serpent sold the first couple? “Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). At its core, the lie claimed that they didn’t need God; they could be like God. They could do it all on their own. Their choice to swallow this lie drove a wedge into a perfect relationship.

 We are given freedom not for the sake of autonomy. As Sarayu reminds Mack in the garden, “Freedom involves trust and obedience inside a relationship of love.” We are terrible judges of good and evil. We have proven that over and over. We need an intimate relationship with God to trust him fully for our needs.

 Have you ever viewed your relationship with God as a conversation between friends? He desires an organic, living and breathing, constant life-giving relationship with us. It’s an ongoing, intimate dialogue with Him as He helps us navigate the choices and challenges we encounter. We must have complete reliance on His loving affirmation and healing presence in our pain and confusion. It’s a willing trust in His ability to do what’s best in us and for us.

 Jesus offered us a beautiful garden-related metaphor of what this relationship can look like. It’s abiding, remaining, and staying connected to our life-giving source and drawing everything we need from Him. He said,

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.” (John 15:1-4)

Jesus was talking about a regenerative process: remaining, abiding in Him, drawing nutrients and sustenance and life from Him so that fruit can naturally grow out of us. The pruning process is for our own good. It does not have to be always, painful, though sometimes it might be. Our perception of the process comes back to the question of how we view the Gardener: Can I trust Him? Is He really there for me? Is His love truly good? Does He really find me beautiful, mess and all?

 God sees so much more clearly than we do. His perspective is eternity. His understanding is unlimited. We will never fully grasp the spiritual realities at work until we fully enter God’s presence in heaven. But we can accept His invitation and trust that He is working to transform us from the inside out.

 There’s a great line in *The Shack* that Sarayu says later in the garden: “Wild and wonderful, and perfectly in process,” she says. “Magnificent!” That is who we are and that is what God sees in us. “Wild and wonderful, and perfectly in process. Magnificent!”