

Rose Colored Glasses

Fourth Sunday in Lent

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Text: John 3:14-21

focus: God's sees us through the lenses of steadfast love, and desires us to see this way too

function: To turn the congregation from fear and judgment towards love of God.

"Rose colored glasses"

"She sees the world through rose colored glasses" usually means someone is not looking reality square in the face. They are shading it to be sweeter or more lovely than it actually is. "rose colored glasses" - for the naive, for the weak, for the optimist-to-a-fault.

The truth is we all see the world through lenses. We are viewing our circumstances through the lens of our beliefs, or experiences. Many of you have probably heard the story of the couple whose boys would not get along. For months, even years they struggled to understand - and finally decided to take them to see a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist immediately recognized that one boy was an extreme pessimist, and one an extreme optimist. He proposed an experiment. The pessimist they would put in a room full of toys, and the optimist they would put in a room full of horse manure. An hour later the parents came back with the psychiatrist to find the pessimistic boy sitting in a corner. When asked why he wasn't playing with the toys, he said - "Aahh, at first I was going to, and then I realized I'd probably break one and then you'd be angry... so I decided not to play at all." Then they checked in on the optimistic boy, and found him knee deep in the manure, shoveling for all he was worth. "What are you doing?", they asked. He joyfully replied, "Well, with all this manure, there's gotta be a pony in here somewhere!"

This might be a case of seeing the world through rose colored glasses, in the traditional sense.

There is another sense in which we might wear rose colored glasses.

Earlier I drew our attention to the colored lights surrounding us - I'd like us to notice them once again. Through the past several weeks of Lent we have been changing the colors in the

sanctuary to match qualities of God (mercy, wisdom, ...)-- you can find this explained in more detail on the back of your bulletins -- and today's color is Rose, for the quality of Steadfast Love.

I submit to you today that God wears the rose colored glasses of steadfast love, and through scripture God invites us to wear those glasses too.

These glasses don't try to shade reality to a more pleasant tone, but rather - like 3D glasses - bring everything into sharper focus...even a new dimension of seeing.

Here's what I mean (and I will be leaning on some wiser folks to help us explore this...)

When I read this very famous passage from John, I confess that my mind jumps quickly to notions of heaven and hell--final judgment. And when I read this with a group of friends, they also wondered about the judgment language - the stark light/dark, believer/unbeliever contrast.

“those who believe are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already...”

Judgment does not sound like steadfast love - it does not sound attractive.

Especially when we recognize our own doubts--the way we test reality

daily...

And when we recognize the value of questioning, and not blindly believing...

And when we hold experiences of those whom we don't necessarily want to imitate telling us that we must simply “believe” ... “have faith” ...

And when we recognize that “belief” has been used by people as a cold measuring tool for a “mental assent” -- a way of determining who is in and who is out -- (“Do you believe this proposition? Yes or no.”)

When we take all of that into account... we can see how this passage, which quickly condemns or saves based on one's belief, might not feel like good news, despite its message of love and life.

Quite simply, is God's steadfast love for all or only for some?

I would like to invite a Franciscan Father and an Anglican Author to weigh in on this question and this passage, and offer one way of seeing it.

The first thing that our Franciscan, Richard Rohr would have us understand is that “there is no such thing as a value-free interpretation of anything.” How we come to scripture, and our

vision of God, changes what we get from scripture. Similar to our young optimist and pessimist--how we understand and participate in any truth is affected by how we approach it.

Rohr would go so far as to say, "If you don't interpret a text with a pre-existing condition of faith and love, your egocentricity, your agenda, and your anger can always be presumed to be in charge, and you will interpret the Bible in whichever way you want."

So, put on the rose colored glasses in order to see what God is up to.

When we see the world through the lens of Steadfast Love, we see also that God is pursuing a relationship with us. "For God so loved the world"--the cosmos, the entirety of everything "that he gave his only Son..."

"When one party has all the power" says Richard Rohr, "--which is, for most people, the very definition of God--the only natural response is fear, hiding, or seeking to manipulate the situation. The true give and take of a love relationship is just not possible."

"The only way this pattern can be changed is for God, from God's side, to shift the power equation and offer us instead a world of mutuality and vulnerability. Jesus is the living image of this power-shift, God changing sides from power to powerlessness"

Sister Wendy Beckett says that "we cannot truly love what is unknown."

God makes known in the Son, not to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved into a love relationship through him.

Is there a simple way to say it? God's self-emptying in Christ is the Way to come out of fear, hiding, and manipulation, and be embraced by an eternal love.

Allowing that God is love, and opening to that love, is belief in the name(or revelation) of the only Son of God. Unbeliefis choosing to remain in a world full of fear, of hiding our true selves, and of personal gain through manipulation. This is condemnation. As the John 3:18 says, "those who do not believe are condemned already." Condemned to live in a shadow-land of fear.

And this is where we invite our Anglican Author, C.S. Lewis. In his book *The Great Divorce*, Lewis imagines an afterlife where Hell is a dismal twilight world where everyone there can get whatever they want just by imagining it -- but none of it is really real. These people are continuously invited to go to heaven on a bus that takes them to a very real place -- so real and substantial that it hurts their ghost feet just to walk on the grass. And most choose not to

stay, because they don't want to give up what they think they have in hell. And so the Teacher in his book tells us, "All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it."

I wonder if Lewis was riffing on this passage from John: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light..."

"God so loved the world..."

May this passage be a beautiful testimony of God's vulnerable love, that we might be saved, but never forced into salvation (because that would never make for a very good relationship).

And in the end, wearing rose colored glasses, I can see that God is far more loving than I could ever be towards any creature and all creatures--and so I say with the psalmist, "I trust in the unfailing love of God for ever and ever." Amen.