

## Can God be Seen in You by Others?

Romans 7:19

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

There's a story that you might have heard about five wise men in a certain Indian village, and they decided they'd try to find out who was the wisest. And so they arranged really a test for them. They put something in a huge building in the middle of the village, except that this building had no windows in it; and so it was absolutely dark inside. And then each of these wise men were to go into this dark building and tell just by touch what was inside the building.

And so all the village gathered, and the first wise man went in through the door, and they closed the door on him. And he felt forward and felt with his hands a huge flat surface. And he felt a little to the right and a little to the left and still that flat surface seemed to go on and on, and he couldn't find the end of it, as far as he was able to move. And so he came out and he said, "It's a wall. There is a wall in that building. There is a huge wall, the ends of which I couldn't touch at all."

And then the second wise man went in and he went into the darkened building and verged a little to the left and bumped into what seemed to him round like that, a kind of pillar. And he tried to put his arms around it but it was so thick that he couldn't get his arms around to the other side. And so he came out and he said, "It's a tree. There's a huge tree in that building, so big that I couldn't get my arms around it."

And then the third wise man went in and he verged over to his left, a little further this time, and he found this thing hanging down it seemed from the ceiling. And he put his arms around it, and he could get his arms around it and it seemed like a thick, thick thing. And so he came outside and said, "It's a rope. There's a huge rope in that building that is hanging from the roof."

And then the fourth wise man went in and he went over vaguely in that direction and he put his hands up and almost put what seemed like a sharp, sharp point right through his hand. And he felt it and he was clear what it was and he came out and said, "There is a massive spear in that building. It is just a big long spear, and it has a point so sharp that it will go through your hand in a moment."

And then the fifth wise man went in and he was feeling up in the direction of where the spear was and then he felt a breeze, and he suddenly felt a kind of wind blowing on him. And he put up his hand and it seemed like a huge leaf, bigger than any leaf he had ever seen on a tree. And he came out and said, "The building is full of huge leaves."

And the wise men gave all that information to the villagers and then the villagers said, "Alright, we'll see which of you is right." They opened the doors and out lumbered the most massive elephant that you could ever imagine in your life. And one man felt the side of the elephant and said, "It's a wall." And another man felt the leg of the elephant and said, "It's a tree." And the other man felt the tusk of the elephant and said, "It's a spear." And the other man felt the trunk of the elephant and said, "It's a rope." And the other man felt the huge ear of the elephant and said, "It's a leaf."

And in a way, I mean, they were all right, in a way. And yet you could imagine the confusion in the villagers mind as they tried to imagine a wall that has leaves on it, and a spear, and has a rope. It's impossible to create a picture that makes any sense, because even though they were all telling the truth, and telling what they had seen, they made no sense to anyone else, because they were telling only parts of the whole. They were describing only parts of the whole, and it didn't make sense to anyone.

When you say, "It's probably better to eat fruit and vegetables than to eat meat." It probably is. When you say, "It's probably better not to smoke, or drink too much." It probably is. When you say that, "Unselfish capitalism is probably more scriptural than the socialism that we see in our world," you're probably right. Those are all parts of reality. And they're all parts of the truth that is God.

But loved ones, it's interesting, if that's what your friends hear from you about God, you can see they're in a worse shape even than the villagers, who heard about the part of the elephant that was a wall, or the part of the elephant that was a tree. They really have no touch with reality when you tell them about those individual parts. And of course, if you major in those individual parts, if you're really hot on 'no smoking or drinking', or you're really hot on 'eating fruit and vegetables and no meat', or you're really hot on 'capitalism as opposed to socialism', then, if you major in those things, you actually don't only fail to give them a picture of God as he really is, but you actually give them a contorted picture of God. Because even those are all parts of reality, they are only parts and they don't represent reality itself. They don't really enable a person to touch the reality of God.

Now actually our song book might not be too bad. I think some of Wesley's hymns are better than some of these, but this song book may well touch our contemporary life in a better way than many of the old traditional hymns. But if that's what you tell people about what you do on Sunday they're hearing only a part of reality and they're not getting any true picture of God as he really is.

I think our open prayer time is far better than the pastor fiddling away on his own, trying to pray a prayer for all of you, instead of you praying your own prayers. But, that is only a part of reality; it's not God himself. It may be that victory over sin and self, and victory over anger, and envy, and jealousy through faith in our death with Jesus, is even a vital truth. It's absolutely vital. But if that's what others hear from you about God and about reality, actually they're only hearing a part and they're not seeing the whole.

Indeed, at the risk of tramping on your toes, the virgin birth I think is absolute truth. I think it is essential. The resurrection of Jesus is absolute truth. This dear book, I think, is God's supernaturally inspired revelation of himself. But even those things, however essential they are, are only parts of reality. They're only parts of God; they're not God himself. And to the extent that you share only those things at work through the week, you're actually not helping anybody very much. You're giving people a part of reality, or a part of truth, and actually it may just be that part that will put them off God rather than will draw them to God.

And so it can be argued that even our muddling attempts at witnessing can often do harm, and we can end up discussing doctrines, or principles, or methods of worship, or points of belief, or behavior patterns, and all we're doing is distracting people from God himself, to subordinate parts of worshipping him and subordinate parts of believing in him. And really in some ways it is deceptive, because it's very easy for dear friends of ours at work, and dear colleagues at school to get a very

contorted view of what God is like, when they listen to you and me outlining our doctrines, outlining our beliefs, spouting off about what we believe about this and what we believe about that, telling them about our church and the way we do things. It can often 'put them off' God more than it leads them to God.

And in fact, what they need to see is reality as a whole. Reality as a whole; not bits of reality and parts of reality. You may say, "No Pastor, I mean a part of reality is better than nothing." No, really it's not. A part of reality gives them a false impression of what reality is. What they need to see is God as he really is.

Now you may say, "Well, I mean, that's impossible. It's difficult for you or anybody else, with all of us concentrating here on a Sunday morning, it's difficult enough for you to present all of reality. How are we going to present all of reality? We cannot show them all of God, because of the inadequate creatures that we are. How can we ever show them God as he really is?" And yet if they don't see that, really they won't be able to respond to God.

Stand back for a minute. Stand back from that building. What is in that building? An elephant, that's what's in that building. Stand back now from God. What is God, or who is God? God is our Father and he's our Savior. He's our Savior because he made us over again in Jesus, and he recreated us, and enabled us to become new creations in Christ. That's the only part of God that you can actually show your friends at work: the part of him that has replaced something selfish, or something sinful, or something unlike him, in your life. That's it. That's it.

You can't actually show them the part of God that you don't need. Maybe you are a very honest person; you probably can't show them God, through your honesty, because maybe you were brought up by your mom and dad to be honest, and you are honest. But you have something in your life that you know is not like God. You have something in your life that 'they' know is not like God. When you allow 'that' to be replaced by God's own nature, when you allow that to be crucified with Christ, that's the part of God that you can show them. That's a glimpse of God, as he really, is that will come home to them as live.

When they see something in you and they say, "He is a changed man; she is a changed woman. I'll tell you what she was like, and here's what she is like now. And it's not just that they're better; it's not just that they're morally good; there's something beautiful in it; there's something of God in it; there's something of Jesus in it." When they see that, they've seen God.

I read an expert in 'aesthetics' -- 'aesthetics' not 'ascetics' but 'aesthetics', the study of beauty. Yates and all the English poets were involved in that. And this writer said, "The only authentic thing, the only truly authentic thing in a painting, the only really authentic thing in a painting, of any kind, is that which cannot be expressed any other way." Now think of it, the only authentic thing in a painting is that which cannot be expressed through any other art form.

You see in other words, if you can describe in words what there is in a painting, then that's not the 'one' authentic part of that painting; then it can be expressed in words just as well. If you can express in sculpture what is expressed in painting then that's not the authentic part of that painting. The only authentic part of a painting is that which cannot be expressed in any other way.

Similarly you can apply it to sculpture. The only authentic part of a sculpture is that that cannot

be expressed any other way. I don't know if – I haven't done much study of this, but you know that sculpture appears to your sense of touch. And so it's the shape, and it's the smoothness; it's the feel of a sculpture that makes it different from a painting. Now if you could reproduce that in a painting then that is not an authentic part of sculpture. So whatever cannot be expressed in any other way, that's the authentic part of the painting. That's the authentic part of your witness.

The only authentic part of your 'presentation of reality' to your friends, and to your colleagues, and to your relatives, is that part of you which has been destroyed on Calvary in Jesus, and has been recreated in his image and beauty; that's the part of you that is authentically God, and that is your testimony to the reality of God.

2014-11-02 To Here 16:20 p.4

Now loved ones, I sympathize with you if you sit there and say, "What about my brilliant explanations of theology? What about my insights into politics? What about my understanding of human nature? What about the way I love them, I just love them to pieces?" No, no it's all bluff, it's all bluff. I sympathize with you, we'd all like it to be those things but all those things do testify on the whole to ourselves. The only authentic part of God that others will touch through your life, the only part of reality that they will touch, is the part of you that you have allowed Jesus to replace with himself and that part they will recognize as God. That's it folks.

It's not all the discussion about doctrines, or beliefs, or views, or ideas. It's not all the talk about what is the right way to behave, or what is the right thing to do or the wrong thing to do. It is simply a question of what you have allowed God to redeem in your life. That's the part of God that others are seeing through you. That's it. That and nothing more, that and nothing less.

So if only to cut down all the airways, if only to cut down all the air traffic and all the chaos that is going out from you as so called witnessing, will you bow before God this morning and ask him, "Lord God, I've done a lot of talking about you, I've done a lot of describing my views on things. I've done a lot of advising but I think all I've told them is that there may be a tree in there, or there may be a rope in there, or there may be a wall in there. But Lord, I want them to begin to touch you. Now what in my life do you want to change so that they can see you through me?" And loved ones, that's all we've got to give.

I would ask you as we bow our heads before God, would you ask him that? Would you ask him if there's something in you that he wants to change so that your children, so that your roommate, so that your colleagues, so that your friends could touch God? And then ask him to change that in you this morning.

Let us pray. Dear Father, the discussion of religious views comes so naturally to us we just love to talk Lord, you know that. Our tongues just go up and down like mad trying to give out all the

great wisdom we have. And then Father we just love to rule over people's lives, we love to make them do what we think they should and so Father you know how often we've attempted to witness and ended up telling people what they ought to do. And Lord we see that even though all these things may be true they are only parts of reality and not reality itself.

And we see Lord that there's only one way in which our dear friends can see that you are their redeemer and savior and that is if they see the part of us that has been redeemed by you and has been changed by you and destroyed by you and replaced by your own nature. So Father we bow before you now this morning and ask you to give us light about that. Lord, what is it in me that puts other people off you? What is it in each of us that distracts other people from your nature and your dear character?

Lord we know that you destroyed that in Jesus on Calvary. Father we say to you take it now, take the rotten thing from us now. We give it to you Lord, take it and destroy it now this morning in us and Father replace our impatience with your own patient heart and character. Lord as we are willing to bear with other people, as we are willing to endure the consequences of their wrong actions, will you replace our impatience Lord with your patient heart and character? Father, will you replace our indifference and our casualness with your heart of love? As we are ready Father to begin to give ourselves to other people, and as we are willing to forget ourselves and to put them first, and to begin to want the best for them whatever it costs us. Lord will you now replace our casualness and our indifference to people with your heart of love? Father we ask you now this morning to give us reality in ourselves so that when others touch us they touch you.

And now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and ever more. Amen.