

Lent 4C 2010
Luke 15:1-3. 11b-32
Sermon for Advent LC
March 14th, 2010

“You Are Seen”

Dear sisters and brothers, grace to you and peace from God the Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The movie Avatar has gotten a lot of attention since it came out and rightfully so as the movie is an absolute amazing spectacle of graphics combined with a very solid story line. How many of you have seen it? Good! For those who haven't, we won't ruin the story but will give a brief explanation...it is a story of two worlds colliding- the human world and the world of another place called Pandora. Pandora is inhabited by people who are called Na'vi who you get to know through the integration of the human world who then become like them. It's truly fascinating! One of the most profound things of the Na'vi people however is not their huge stature, their blue skin, their amazing ability to live among the trees but rather the way they greet another person. Upon seeing someone they don't say, "hey, how you doing?" Or "how are you?" only to get "fine" in return. Rather they say "I see you." "I see you." In one of the scenes where a human is being trained in the way of the Na'vi it is explained- it's not just "I see you" but it's that I see through you, I see in you, I understand you, I feel you, I get you." "I see you". How profound, how authentic, how warm. What if we greeted one another in the same way- truly seeing the people we interacted with? Rather than just hurriedly exchanging pleasantries and hoping they don't really respond or worse yet not noticing them at all. I think our world would be different. This idea of being seen is intense and fits quite well with our notion of God and who we are in relation to our God. You see, God sees us for who we are and then challenges us to see others as he first see us- as His children. Yes, friends, you are seen- you are seen by the God who chases after you, you are seen by the God who rescues the prodigal and reaches out to the scorned brother, you are seen for who you are and for what you are not, you are seen and you are loved...period.

The prodigal son- that old story that we all know comes at us like an old friend doesn't it- most of you probably have some reaction as soon as you hear the story for it is so well known. Both Charles Dickens and Ralph Waldo Emerson said it is the greatest story ever written in the Bible and in the world- it crosses boundaries of religion and has this ultimate hope of reconciliation which is so desperately needed. You know the story, right? You how it ends- you probably even put yourself in the story as one of the Characters...perhaps you are the Father- who has loved one who ran off on you or who betrayed you and then you welcomed them back. Maybe you are the older brother, who does what is expected of you only to see others seemingly blow their chance, scour what they have and then get only embraced when they decide to come to their senses. And maybe you are the prodigal, the one who has ran off once or maybe quite often- and you need to hear this story of God's love present in the father. Wherever you find yourself embrace it. Let the word of God speak to you and fill you. I could sit down and allow the story itself to fill us in this place, to allow our minds and our souls to do what they need now, where we are at, wherever we are at. But I think we should dig a little further into this story, this greatest story and allow it to breathe

perhaps even something new. Notice with me what happens when the son returns to the father after realizing his life was so bad– he is ready to confess how wrong he was, ready to admit how dumb he had been, ready to repent– but he never gets to even finish– as soon as his father sees him in the distance he runs to him, he embraces him, he sees him. He sees him not as the scoundrel that he is, but as his son, the one who was lost and now is found– he sees him and he loves him.

But the story does not end with the Father embracing the prodigal upon his return– he orders a party, and then he has to deal with the other brother. Now, to be fair the other brother has a right to be upset– right? But the grace of the Father is such that there is no room for that– what strikes me here is that as the father talks to the older brother he seemingly says wake up and realize the joy in your brother being home. He was gone, he was dead, he was broken, but now he is home and with us– we need to embrace him. But the brother is thinking, why won't he do it again...and the father is not even concerned with that– he sees both brothers solely as his children– not as the do it all good brother and the worthless younger brother but as his children who deserve to be loved. That is grace....but grace is dangerous isn't it. What I mean by that is I have heard many people abuse grace if that is possible– heard folks say well it doesn't matter how I live or what I do for God will forgive me right? Right...God will forgive you– but there are consequences for sin, people are hurt because of our sin, people feel alienated because of our sin– just ask the prodigal son– the hell he lived in shows us that when we turn our back on God when we run away from the promises of our God our life will be less blessed and a lot harder than when we are fully connected to God and live as he calls us to. So Grace yes is about God seeing us as we are, accepting us for who we are and embracing our faults fully and completely but grace is also about God loving us too much to leave us where we are at.

Friends, you are seen– you are seen as a child of God made perfect because of the death of Christ. Yes, God sees you–God sees your brokenness, God cries at your sinfulness, God shudders when you treat one as less than yourself and cringes when you fail to see Christ in your neighbor and God calls you to live into the identity that he has given you. But in the end, God sees you and loves you. Grace wins because of Christ. Friends, allow yourself to be seen, accept the fact that you are God's and see yourself as God sees you and rejoice that you who were lost are now found. And...see the lost among you and throw a party because you may be the one who can show them that God loves them too. The gift of being seen and loved by God is a call to see and love your neighbor.

God loves you and so do I. Amen.