

“So, What Do You See?”

Luke 20:9-16/Isaiah 5:1-7

Scout Sunday/February 15, 2025

1st Presbyterian Church of Sharon

By Rev. Dr. Glenn Hink

I. “Myopia.” It’s also called “near sightedness.” It’s an eye condition that causes distant objects to appear blurry and close up objects clear. “Myopia.” I’ve had it since I was a teenager. I got glasses so I could drive at 16. Then in my early thirties I switched over to contacts. And so with my “myopia” I could see close, and the contacts helped with distance.

And it was all good, until my late forties. It was getting harder to see things close. So, I got some “cheaters,” some reading glasses. That meant I had to wear my contacts, AND carry around “cheaters” to read. It was a bit of a “pain in the neck.”

When I finally went to the eye doctor he told me I had “presbyopia.” I thought as a Presbyterian pastor that was “cool;” “presbyopia” and Presbyterian. But come to find out, it just meant my eyes were getting old, less flexible, less able to also see things up close. So, I went back to glasses. Trifocals in fact, and they help with distance, intermediate and close up.

I think in a “figurative sense,” most people have myopia. We tend to see things close by and right now better than far away and in the future. We see from our own smaller point of view. And so, then we assume it will always be like it is right now. And we don’t see the future well. Or other views well. “Myopia;” nearsightedness.

I took my grandson Brixton to the Pro Football Hall of Fame a couple weeks ago. Brixton is 10. It was his Christmas gift. We went on a Thursday when it was bitter cold. Needless to say, there were not many people at the Pro Football Hall of Fame that day. We pretty much had it to ourselves.

And so we saw the jerseys and the busts of the players in the Hall of Fame. We watched videos about football players. We sat in a room that looked like a locker room and saw a life size hologram of Joe Namath tell us about players who had an impact beyond football. We saw the Super Bowl trophy that was given to the Seattle Seahawks last Sunday night. We saw sixty years of Super Bowl rings that went from simple to something that looked like they weighed 5 pounds. And we saw the helmets and shoulder pads that went from two pieces of leather sewed together with a little cotton in between them to the armor players wear today.

So, as I was watching the Super Bowl last Sunday evening I kept thinking about those Pro Football players from 100 years ago. Could they have ever imagined the size and speed and

strength of players today? Could they ever have imagined the equipment and the celebrity and the multi-million \$\$ contracts? Could they ever have imagined “the show” that Pro Football has become. Probably not. They looked from their own point of view. “Myopia.” Near-sightedness. We tend to see what’s now and what’s up close much better than the distant future.

II. Texts and Brief Exegesis

The first reading from Isaiah is called “the song of the vineyard.” It’s a song, a poem, and a metaphor. Vineyards were part of life in ancient Israel, so people knew about grapes. Isaiah may have sung this song during the grape harvest.

The first part of the song is about the good care the vineyard owner gives to the vineyard. The owner does everything that should be done to get good grapes. And so, when the harvest comes, that’s what he expects, good grapes. But then there’s the surprise, the disappointment. After all the work the vineyard only yields small, wild, sour grapes.

The singer then turns to the audience and asks what to do. Everything that could be done was done. The planning was for good grapes. The work was for good grapes. The expectation was for good grapes. It only made sense. And yet...it’s only sour, bitter, wild grapes. What is to be done?

The singer then sings what everyone was thinking; tear it all down and start over. Remove the protection. Remove the care. Let the weeds grow and the wild animals trample it down. The vineyard produces wild grapes, so let it go wild. And you can almost see the people listening to the song shaking their heads “yes, yes, that’s what I would do.”

And then comes the zinger. The singer sings to the political and religious leaders, “You are the vineyard. God gave you the best. God expected a people who love God and live with justice and kindness and faithfulness. But instead, you live with greed and pride and corruption like the nations all around you. And so, the judgement is coming.”

“Myopia.” Near-sightedness. Their own small point of view. Did they only see who they were and thought that was fine? Or did they see who they should be as God’s people, and the judgement that was coming in the distance? “Myopia.”

The second reading for the morning comes from Luke 20:9-16. Jesus is in Jerusalem at the Temple. And just before this reading he has been arguing with the religious leaders there. So in this text Jesus turns to talk to the people who gathered to hear him, while the religious leaders are there on the edges. Jesus is speaking to the people, but loud enough so the religious leaders can hear it, too. As I read the text, listen also for that “song of the vineyard” from Isaiah.

Read Luke 20:9-16.

So, did you hear “the song of the vineyard” from Isaiah? The people there listening to Jesus did. They knew that text well. And they knew it was God’s warning. And they knew that

indeed Israel did fall years later to the Babylonian invasion. So, they knew Isaiah spoke God's word. And they knew that Jesus was telling them an updated "song of the vineyard" for their place and time.

In the parable a man owns a vineyard. He leases it out to tenants. They work the vineyard, but the owner still owns it. And at the time of the harvest, they are to share the harvest of grapes. The owner takes his share, and the tenants get their share.

But the tenants have other ideas. They want to claim the vineyard as their own. And so, they will totally disregard the owner and take it by force. So, when a servant of the owner comes to collect his share of the grape harvest, they beat him and send him away empty. And then it happens again and again. The owner graciously gives them the chance to do the right thing. But instead, become more determined to take the vineyard as their own.

So finally, the vineyard owner decides to send his son. He thinks certainly they will respect him. But it's exactly opposite. When they see the son, they decided to kill him so they can claim the inheritance of the vineyard as their own. And so, they do.

By now those who have been listening to Jesus are getting "worked up." They can clearly see the corruption, the disrespect, and the violence of the tenants. They know something has to be done. The owner must act strongly to make things right. This dishonor and injustice of the tenants can't be allowed to stand.

And so, Jesus says what they all had been thinking...been hoping. The owner will come with force, take back the vineyard that is his, and destroy the tenants. The plan and hope of the owner of the vineyard will go forward. The tenants will see they have forgotten their place. Their small view is not the owners' view. They have "myopia." They don't see the big picture. And it will cost them.

As Jesus has been telling the parable, everyone knows it's more than just a story. Like Isaiah, it's God word to them. The owner of the vineyard is God. The tenants are the religious leaders who are overhearing Jesus tell the story. The servants are the prophets who warned the religious leaders over the years. And the son is Jesus. It's a damning parable. Some of the people there start to see. And the religious leaders start to "squirm."

And then Jesus presses them even more. The vineyard owner will lease out the vineyard to others. And those who listen know Jesus is saying that the plan and purpose and salvation of God will move on to include others...many others...many others different than them. "Heaven forbid" the religious leaders say. But it did happen. All different types of people from different cultures and languages and races come to become God's people. Here we are.

"Myopia." Near-sightedness. Small vision. They couldn't see the big distant plan of God.

III. Theological Reflections

“Myopia.”

About 400 years ago a shipload of Pilgrims landed on the northeast coast of America. The first year they established a town site. The next year they elected a town government. The third year the town government planned to build a road five miles westward into the wilderness.

In the fourth year the people tried to impeach their town government. They thought it was a waste of public funds to build a road five miles westward into the wilderness. “Who needs to go there anyway?” they asked.

It’s a strange thing. Here we have people who have the vision to see three thousand miles across the sea and overcome great hardships to get there. And yet in just a few years they cannot even see five miles out of town. “Myopia.”

“Myopia.” Christian faith is about more than “myopia.” It’s about seeing the distant and wonderful plan of God. It’s a big view. It’s about living with both faith and humility. Many of those who heard Isaiah missed it. Many of those who heard Jesus missed it. God calls us to see the 3000-mile salvation of God for all people, most different than us. However, it’s sadly the case that some Christians struggle to see 5 miles out of town. “Myopia.”

The vision for 1st Church for almost fifteen years is “Deep Well: No Fences.” The story is this. Almost twenty years ago I took my twin boys Nick and Dan out to Arizona on a high school graduation trip. We landed in Phoenix, got a rental car, and drove up to see the Grand Canyon. We then started driving west through the scrubland and desert.

Along the way I started to notice herds of cattle, but no fences. I thought that was odd. Why no fences? Didn’t the cattle roam and get lost?

We stopped at a convenience store to get something to drink. A cowboy was in the store. So, I said to him, “I live in western PA and grew up in Washington State. In those places you need fences if you have cattle. If you don’t have fences, you lose your cattle. But here I’m seeing cattle without fences. How does that work?”

So, the cowboy smiled and replied, “Well, cattle aren’t the smartest of God’s creatures. But they are smart enough to stay close to good source of water, to a deep well. A few sometimes wander off, but not often. The secret is a good well.”

So back on the road I started thinking about that. And I started wondering; could you have a church like that? Could you have a church defined by the deep well of God’s grace, rather than the fences of for this and against that, red or blue, Republican or Democrat, conservative or progressive? Could you make room for various points of view around the love of God, and not build fences to keep people in and out? Could you live together in God’s view, not a small view?

So that’s been the vision of 1st Church. It’s different than most. It’s a big view. It’s more than “myopia.” It calls us to be more. It’s not easy, but I think it’s right. “Deep Well: No Fences.”

I think it fits with what Isaiah is saying. I think it fits with what Jesus is saying. And I think it fits the generous and gracious dream of God. What do you see?