

Pr Daniel Hoffman, DMin, STS

The Fourth Sunday of Easter 2022

Acts 13: 15-16, 26-30      Revelation 7: 9-17 John 10: 22-30

So when you look around at the crazy and chaotic world we live in, WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Do you look at Ukraine and see the Russians liberating the Ukraine people from Nazi oppression or do you see a fascist dictator trying desperately to claim land, territory, and seaports that belong to an independent democratically ruled nation state?

When you see the people of Ukraine standing in bread lines do you see the world reaching out to feed a starving war ravaged people, or do you also see the 4 Million third world peoples who have been suddenly put on half rations because the wheat, and cooking oil that Ukraine formerly produced is no longer available for export?

When you hear the weather reports and notice that those historic 100 year storms and floods and Tornadoes are showing up once every ten years, do you see global warming and climate change or do you just see weather that is unpredictable and dangerous?

When you look over toward China and see an economy grinding to a standstill, military might stretching out into the China Sea and encircling Hong Kong, skyscrapers incomplete and empty, and one of the world's most populous nations who are forced to survive in a land where 80% of the groundwater is polluted and not able to be consumed by humans much less cattle...Do you see an efficient peoples republic, or a disaster.....

What we see, in the end determines, how we act, what we do, and who we become!

In John's Gospel SEEING is not about physical sight or even about the wisdom that comes with age and experience, SIGHT for John is all about FAITH, it is a spiritual matter that leads toward FAITH, or UNBELIEF, so for John SEEING is everything....

The crowds in the Temple approach Jesus, or maybe we should say that they confront and even accost Jesus demanding that he tell them plainly....Are you the Messiah or not?

And Jesus responds by asking them to open their eyes, to look at him and see for themselves.....because this message of salvation, the word that God has sent among his faithful people to save them, the word of Hope and Peace, the word of LIFE.....It is not a letter, it is not a theological treatise, it is not a philosophical concept or argument that if we hear it and get it right everything will be GOOD! This word is a living word, it is the very person of Jesus of Nazareth, God's sent son, our Savior, the CHRIST!

We see that....to varying degrees, and in very different hues. Somedays the image is clear and in focus, and some days Jesus is there, and I See him, but the savior vision is a bit

blurry, and the message of God's love for me, seems a bit fuzzy at best. All of the means I am a normal living Christian. Because as long as we draw breathe, we have to keep checking our sight against a standard. I have Age related Macular Degeneration...and I work to keep it in check. Every day I look at this crazy grid to see if there are blurry lines....If I see a few tomorrow I check to see if they are still there, if there are more of them or if they have faded away. As Christians we have to do the same thing, only our standard is not an eye chart, or a AREDS GRID, our standard is Jesus, his Cross, and even more the ones who have followed Jesus in faith in this world, and made his saving love known to others.

In the book of Revelation these are the ones arrayed in white, and we hear that side conversation with one witness asking another Who are these arrayed in white?, and as the story is told about their faith, their witness, their vision of Jesus, we begin to notice that our own vision becomes clearer, as Jesus the messiah savior, stands among us!

So who are these robed in white? They are more than 2 million women children and elderly refugees who have fled Ukraine as their homes, cities, farms, and businesses are bombed and destroyed.....They are those who bear the marks of Christ's suffering, and they are the Millions of people in Poland and Moldova who have opened their homes to receive these, because they look upon them and they see Jesus...

Who are these robed in white? They are the 700,000 evangelical Christians living in Ukraine who are marked as WESTERN sympathizers because of their religious practices.....These are marked with a cross, because they have all been added to the death list, those not worthy of life in a purified Russian state.

Who are these robed in white? They are the hundreds of thousands of Tamil Christians living in India, the land where Thomas the doubter went in the days after the Resurrection to spread the Good News.....Today they live in a nation where certain Hindu sects have pledged to return India to its rightful spiritual roots of Hinduism.....To reach that goal they have placed public placards calling for the death and destruction of these very Christian persons, and the destruction of their houses of worship....

Who are these robbed in white? They are ordinary Christians who say NO when their neighbors suffer injustice, when the fear that is all too present rears up as blatant racism, sexism, or simply acting as if any other person is less than human because of the color of their skin, the clothes they wear, the political party they follow, the language they speak, the way they pray, the scripture they revere, or the people they choose to associate with.

Who are these robbed in white.....THEY are you and me, and our fellow Baptized Christian Brothers and Sisters around the globe..... the people of faith to whom the message of God's saving love has already been sent.....

In 2015 I was invited to Wittenberg Germany to join with Lutheran Pastors from around the world for 2 weeks of study, travel, and fellowship....When I arrived I met pastors from Norway and Sweden, India, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Brazil, Argentina, Indonesia, Ethiopia, and TEXAS.....We were not at all alike, in fact the differences were amazing.....But what was even more immediately obvious was the common bond we had in Jesus.....The very first evening as we gathered for prayer, we prayed the Lord's prayer in a dozen different languages....It was in the same moment cacophonous and harmony....because you heard in those clashing words, the cadence of our common prayer, and you knew that on any given day....THIS IS WHAT GOD HEARS, and it gladdens God's heart because these are the children who have seen his message in Jesus....

Two years later my friendship with one of those pastors lead me to Zimbabwe Africa for a month long teaching mission....I did not see that one coming.....but it made perfect sense because of what I HAD SEEN in this one brother robbed in white...Shakemore Shoko.....

I saw, I believed, and I followed.....

When you see the stories from John's Gospel, the Book of Acts, and the Book of Revelation side by side, you begin to realize that this message of salvation that God has sent.....It is not a cloak of protection that shields us from the world's chaos, and hides us from the fear and division that surrounds us.....When we see Jesus the Christ as God's sent Son, the one who has come to save us.....That is when we hear him call us by name, and we in turn follow wherever he leads...most often it is into the fray, to bear the cross so that those who have not heard, and have not seen, may know him as God's own gift of saving peace and love for us all.....

When we see Him for who He truly is, we see the Mission that God has given him, and we become the church that God will put to work to carry out that same mission here in this place....

But all of that begins and ends with a simple question.....

When you see Jesus, Just what do YOU SEE?

AMEN