

JUST A SHOE

I heard this joke Thursday.

A man noted the following, after throwing a Frisbee back and forth:

I was wondering why the Frisbee is small when it is far away, yet get's bigger when it gets closer, but then it hit me.

(Of course, you "saw that one coming.")

Most of the time, things are not so obvious.

There was this young boy who was taking advantage of some nice weather. He was outside with a ball and bat.

He'd threw the ball straight up, then swing the bat to try to hit it.
He did this over and over, but never hit the ball.

A young girl about his age walked over from across the street to watch. Again, he threw the ball up..... there was a swing, then a miss.
She yelled out, "Strike One!"

He threw the ball up again,a swing and a miss.
She yelled out, "Strike Two!"

Undaunted, he tossed the ball up again, and with great focus he swung the bat,..... and missed.
She immediately yelled, "Strike THREE.... you're out!"

Smugly, he yelled back, I have you know that I'm the pitcher, and I just threw a NO Hitter!

Sometimes, things are not as they seem or as they appear.
Sometimes,.....our understanding / perception is not so accurate.

Jeremiah was just a boy when God called him to be a prophet. He likely 12-14 years old.
He was an inexperienced boy, and probably nobody thought he was "prophet" material. Jeremiah didn't think so either....because he knew he didn't know what to say or how to say ...whatever.

Apparently, Jeremiah thought he knew better than God--a common misconception many of us suffer from,... and "informed" God of his limitation. Yet, as the passage states, God knew Jeremiah very well. God knew him from birth, and God knew a deeper side of Jeremiah.

There was more to Jeremiah than anybody knew about.
Things were not as they appeared to be on the surface.

God gave Jeremiah a message and the ability to proclaim it, and so the boy prophet began his ministry.

I imagine that caused some dissonance.

The true miraculous / a **message for the spirit** ...isn't necessarily received by everyone,....especially when it comes from an unconventional source--a boy.

Many did not believe or respond to the words of Jeremiah.

Jesus faced a similar situation in his hometown, adding credence to the saying, "No prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown."

Jesus had just finished reading the Isaiah passage (which we talked about last Sunday). Then he handed the attendant the scroll and made his pronouncement that he was fulfilling the prophecy.

All listening were impressed.

They likely commented to each other, "My, isn't he the carpenter's son. Yes, yes....Joseph's son. Nice family.... simple, good people. How nice he read so well, yet... rather bold talk from such a person.

Others probably whispered, "Big talk, but we've heard he did some miraculous things in Capernaum. Maybe he could do a little magic for us?"

Overhearing / realizing their dismissive critique, Jesus tersely responded to their innuendoes, saying, "Just because I'm from here doesn't mean you control me or my destiny, and it doesn't mean that I have to live up to YOUR standards..... or Down to them."

Jesus went on and tried to expand their comprehension.

He pointed out that the prophets didn't create a utopia--all ailments and problems didn't disappear.

People don't appreciate having their bubble popped / having their reality crushed, but that was what Jesus did.

First it was the stereotyping of a prophet, and then it was dashing their concept of what God does.... what God is good for.

Typically, they considered God like a genie in a bottle, and that God's agents, including The Messiah, should fulfill their tangible needs and desires.

That understanding is very superficial, and it fails to appreciate what is truly important--the spirit / the spiritual domain.

God does care about surface / external / empirical concerns, such as food, shelter and physical health. Yet, those things are temporal and shallow.

Jesus didn't restore the sight to everyone, nor did he cure all illnesses.

Miracles were done to teach and inform.../ to pull people to a deeper level....the spiritual.... The domain where love is / where we connect with God.

I image that the prayers of those people were mainly asking God to give them something, or to fix a pain or help them pay the bills, and so forth.

They didn't understand, and therefore were missing out on the true power and wonder of God..... and the man standing in front of them.

We have our own myths and illusions, too.

Some affluent Christians thank God for their wealth and good fortune in life, as if that's what God is for / that's God's job.

They also likely think claiming Jesus will help them get what they want from the world.

Moreover, I wonder what is our expectation for a prophet? How would we respond to a 12 year old prophet?

And, what is our model for a saint, a holy person or an ideal Christian? ???????????

From the Luke text, the crowd didn't appreciate the lecture.

Jesus, in essence, told them that their belief system / their reality was wrong.

They were outraged.

In a way, they actually did hear Jesus as a prophet,... because they decided to Treat him as prophet, in the classical manner. They decided to kill him,..... even though he was a home boy.

At that point, Jesus likely regretted his outburst: Not the message, but the manner.

Oh well, sometimes we all lose self restraint and get a little too honest / blunt with what we say.

So, the crowd drove Jesus to the top of a large cliff at the edge of town.

Proper protocol called for a witness to throw the offender over the cliff, and if the fall isn't lethal, then everybody gets to throw stones.

We don't know if they had second thoughts or if it was God's intervention. Whatever the reason, Jesus was able to slip away and leave.

There would Not be a cliff-hanger in this episode.

In this passage, Jesus exposed two major, destructive flaws in the people's perception.... and theology. Two, yet they are both related because both contain a very superficial, limited view of life--including about others, spirituality and God.

One is about judging and stereotyping others.

Judging and pigeon holing is destructive because it closes the door to potential, the possibility of transformation and to hope. Plus, it diminishes / disregards the activity and surprise of God, too.

Nevertheless, it is hard to avoid judging and stereotyping people. We humans are "hard wired" as animals to see patterns and trust in those assumptions. It is a base, instinctive behaviour,..... but it is possible to rise about the animal level, and that is often what God prompts us to do.

Still, it is a habitual attitude we need to work on.

We do tend to have expectations on how people "should" look and act.

Most Catholics would be disappointed and dismayed if the Pope wore cut offs and a Hawaiian shirt, and smoked a cigar.

We tend to want people to "look" the part.

Many have an image for what a good Christian should look like and how that person should be have -- both are superficial measurements.

And, that applies to pastors..... especially Sunday morning.

The shoes should be appropriate and the hair nicely trimmed.

I think for the most part, we are a gracious and accepting group, yet it is a very different story in the competitive secular domain.

Dressing for success is essential. Home location, one's automobile, place of education and so forth, are all very important indicators of success.

And, those who don't have the "Bling" are considered less, failures or worse.

Subsequently and sadly, we often judge ourselves harsher than we do others.

We take the measurements / conditions from our culture, over lay them on ourselves, and conclude we are less than we are.

The lesson from Jeremiah and Luke attempts to open our eyes to see potential / to see deeper than the surface..... and to recognize God in ourselves and in life.

Yet, for some strange reason we continue to squint or focus on what we can merely touch, and this brings up the second aspect.

Consider First Corinthians 13.

We didn't read that text, yet we are pretty familiar with it and it's in the bulletin, too.

It's often used in weddings and read with a Hallmark Card flavour, and certain parts are often glossed over so as to only focus on the "love" verses.

Even so, those Love lines are very revealing... if we look closely.

Notice, it states: Love is patient, kind and so on.

It does NOT say: Love is rich, good looking, healthy, athletic and well dressed.

And, remember.....God is love.

Love is God's domain / the Spiritual Realm.

Therefore, love / God desires us to understand love / to dwell in love.

God pulls us to grasp this "deeper" level of being / of living.

Jesus lived and taught this enlightenment, too.

Our bodies or lot in life may not be perfect, but that is not what is important.

Listen to verses 11 to 13:

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

We don't fully understand things / life / what is going on or the ways of God.

We are learning....., so it is very prudent that we don't jump to conclusions and judgments.

The superficial--the childish thinking must fade...so that we can grasp the effective Spirit of God,..... in ourselves and in others.

Our physical life / our bodies are like a vessel, a container.

The container is not what is so important; it is what's inside that is.

We are like a container..... like a shoe.

I bet you were wondering when I'd get to the "shoe part".

Shoes are fascinating.

Oh,.... I will add, ..we shouldn't judge a person by their shoes, either.

Shoes are an outer covering, somewhat likes clothes, but shoes are more. Their appearance do reflect its use.

They mold to the feet, and can reveal how it's been used.

Shoes are somewhat like our outer appearance. They reveal who and where we've been. BUT, not where we are going.

[get shoe]

This is an old basketball shoe of mine. [show]

It's rather plain/ basic. It's old, likely 10 or more years, and it is well worn, tattered and soiled.

It's been around: played a lot of games; took me places, and lately, helped mow a lot of grass.

Plus, it's been in contact with some smelly things. It's not pure and clean.

[put shoe down]

Shoes are a bit like each of us--our outer appearance.

They reveal our past by how they look.

In a way, we are like a shoe:

some not yet broken in / not much experience;

some plain and basic;

some maybe clean and fancy;
others, maybe, tattered, well worn, even appearing to be worn out and useless.

However, God can do amazing things, regardless of the apparent condition of the vessel.

In God's eyes / In God's domain, it is NOT the appearance that counts, but rather what's inside.
....meaning is God's Spirit inside and allowed to flow freely.
Is there love inside?

[get water]
It is like drinking pure water from a shoe.

?You want me to show you?

[get other shoe with unseen cup and pour in water]

Okay.
Regardless of the container, God spirit is poured in..... and pours out.
[drink]

Brave? Reckless? Stupid?

NONE OF THE ABOVE.
Your perceptions were wrong.

I put a cup inside the shoe [show]

When we invite God into our lives, God fills us with love and a new awareness!
Surprise happens / enlightenment happens / a new way of being happens.

Even if we are old, worn out or tattered, God's Spirit can still flow through us. God can still use us, regardless.
We can still experience love and what life is supposed to be all about.
And, it's not about what a shoe looks like.

Today's passages reveal that we can engage / perceive life in a different way / in a better fashion.
And,..... we can be a part of that deeper, spiritual, loving reality.

So, let us not jump to conclusions that end potential.
Let us not judge others or ourselves.
Surprise happens / there is hope. God /love is powerful and transforming.

Let us teach our children and youth to reach farther than they can see.
Let us not condemn ourselves. Life is happening now, and God is very present and ready to fill our hearts with passion and purpose.

We are invited to allow God's Spirit into our lives to flow ... to flow love and grace.

Let us look beyond our mortal vision..... to see the divine the dwells all around us, in each of us.
The vessel matters very little,..... but the spirit does matter.

When we are open to potential, to love, to God's Spirit then we will not see so dimly,..... and the prophets will NOT be silenced.

Whoever..... they / we may be.

And, we'll recognize Christ--God's love in Action.