

OBSERVE

When we look for God or turn to God, it seems that we expect something huge, grand or supernatural. Sometimes, we pray for big miracles to solve big problems, or we look for the profound in worship or the scriptures that will shake our spirits and lift us up.

Jesus had a knack for observing everyday life / the common things, and reading God into those stories. Jesus often we put God in the normal or take familiar behaviour and turn it into a parable--a story lesson or an analogy.

Jeremiah and the other prophets frequently did the same.

This practice is noteworthy. It makes sense to use understandable things to get a point across, yet it also tells us that God can be observed in the little, ordinary occurrences of life.

God speaks to us in many ways and through many things.

I think sometime we limit our access to God when we only look for God in the Bible or what we label "religious".

God can reach us through a pop song, a good book or even geese flying through the air.

Moreover, as Jesus did, I think it's a good practice to observe all aspects of life through a "God lens" or measure what we observe by God's standards of value and justice.

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Both of today's Old and New Testament passages contain analogies to get a lesson across.

Both reveal observations that were made and used.

We can easily choose to do that. We can look for God in all things, and we can identify where God's way is blatantly absent.

We can observe life as if Jesus is standing next to us, explaining what is before us.

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This past week, President Obama stated that President Assad of Syria needed to be "punished." He said "punished."

I'm not sure, how that can be managed without hurting a lot of other people.

Regardless, punishment does not correct or heal an undesirable action, and it is erroneously assumed that punishment will dissuade or prevent such actions in the future.

But, it rarely does.

If I recall correctly, Saddam Hussein was "punished" for using and having WMD, yet..... that punishment had no affect on Assad.

Punishment usually just makes the recipient angry and deviant.

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I wonder how God's way could be brought into the crisis in Syria?

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Looking closer to home:

The Toronto police department reported that more officers will be issued tasers in the hopes that the police will not so quickly shoot their guns and kill people.

Using Christ as a standard, we can see that no effort was made to alter the police officers macho and violent tendencies.

There was No repentance. No effort was made to train police to learn other, non-violent ways to solve problems.

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And, observing things close to home:

Farmers are working long hours at getting their crops in.

The time is **now** for the harvest.

All are hoping for good results. They did their part; they did their best,..... but there will be judgment.

Some of the results will be good.... others.....will be graded down.

*I think there is a parable in that.*

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Similarly, lots of time, energy and work went into making Osler School ready for students..... because we value our children.. .....AND, we value our future.

Many, many people are investing themselves so that the students will grade well.....because adult life can be as a harvest.

We can observe our own church

This past week, a Sunday School teacher prepared a classroom here at the church.

There was no reward, no obligation in doing that.

The only reason for taking the time and energy was concern for the children.

Who will notice it? The children will, and that's all that matters.

Viewing our church: how do we measure up.

Are we pouring all into our ministries or are we holding back and needlessly protecting our investments???

Standing back and observing, .....what do we look like?

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Life around us can be fascinating and inspiring, if we pause and observe.....and invite God to show us the lessons.

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Walking through Osler, one can't help but notice all the flowers.

People took the time and worked to plant and care for the flowers.

Flowers don't do much except look nice. There are very few that can be eaten. They are there to add colour to life,..... and soon the frost will take them away.

Even so, all who planted the flowers knew that.

It didn't matter,..... because we need colour in life.  
Beauty is important, just as art is important. Both enhance life, and I think,...help us to better understand God.

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Another observation:  
I once visited a man who was eager to show me his collection.  
He actually had two collections, and was very proud of them.

In his living room were two very large glass jars filled with change / coins, and he was working on filling a third.  
He explained to me that all those coins he found on the ground, the sidewalk or street. Much of his life, he said, he's always looking for coins, and everyone he found he would save in those jars.  
Then, he took me to his basement to show me his other collection.  
He had hundreds, maybe thousands of golf balls in all sorts of containers. He assured me that they were all lost golf balls.  
He tried to convince me that his hobby was similar to Jesus' parables about the lost coins or sheep, but I didn't see it that way.

After I left his house, I thought to myself, "I wonder how much of his life was spent looking down." I wondered how much he missed by constantly looking down for forgotten coins and lost golf balls. ??

Then I contemplated about my focus. Were my obsessions preventing me from seeing the bigger picture. ???

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Sometimes it's good to look at ourselves / to stand back and observe our own actions.

A little over a year ago, it was rudely revealed to me that I didn't know as much about horses as I thought I did.

There was a lesson in that experience.  
When we think we know more than we do and we don't ask for help, then reality may turn us upside down and toss us on our heads.

Perhaps, it is wise to not be confident about our understanding of the Scriptures.  
Maybe we shouldn't be too smug about our theology, and maybe God is bigger than the image we keep in our heads.

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Jeremiah used a very familiar practice, in his time, for an analogy--the potter and the clay.  
Isaiah and others had used pottery making to get a point across.

The pottery illustration was used to get Israel's attention.  
The people needed to see that God was gently trying to work with them, but they still needed to do their part. They needed to shape up.

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In the Luke passage, Jesus uses some hyperbole and analogies to get the crowd to understand / to be better observers of the situation and of themselves.

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Jesus' audience / his attention has now shifted away from the religious leaders..... to the crowd / to the masses.

Jesus had many admirers, like "groupies" that were following Jesus around. They were Jesus people. Physically, they were followers of Jesus.

But, they really didn't grasp what it meant to be a follower of Christ.

Jesus tried to shock them awake / into clearly seeing.

He did this by saying that they must be willing to reject everything and everyone else, if need be.

He told them that they must be prepared to carry a cross to be follower.

Just like the familiarity of a potter, they would know all about carrying a cross--the cross was the Roman's preferred form of execution.

And, the forced *bearing the cross* to the place of execution was a public display to attract ridicule, abuse and rejection.

So, Jesus' analogy meant a true follower must be ready for such rejection, ridicule and hostility.

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Then Jesus prompted them to connect to other observations about assessing before committing / about fully knowing horses before you go for a ride / about knowing what you're getting into before you decide.

Then there was the final shock Jesus gave to them:

Are you willing to give up all of your possessions, if not, then "You are not a follower."

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Jesus is trying to be fair and honest with them.

They need to know the risks and consequences.

It's dangerous to hang around him, and even more hazardous to be a true follower.

The crowds / the so-called followers needed to observe what's really going on,... and they needed to observe--inspect themselves.

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I appreciate Jesus' technique--using general, common observations in order to get people to understand.... which includes prompting them to observe themselves.

Yet, his message will not increase attendance in churches. Instead, it will scare people away. It cuts like a swather.

According to this passage, we don't grow a church; we are to shrink a church.

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I do NOT like this message.

I do Not like what Jesus said in this passage.

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Fortunately,..... we are still clay on the potter's wheel.

In addition, I find comfort in Psalm 139.

There it reveals how God observes us and knows us,... and invests in us.

God is patient and God is nurturing us / working with us / helping us.

But, we need to look at the whole picture--Psalm 139, Jeremiah and the words in Luke 14.

Moreover, there is a call, ....not really a call, but rather a requirement that we honestly observe what is going on and how we fit into the picture.

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The following is a short confession that I found:

We counted the cost of being your children, and found it to be too much for us.

We pondered your words and found them useless for our lives.

But you did not take your hands from us, but continue to recreate us,  
to reshape us, to redeem us.

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All this is interesting and perplexing--was Jesus "really" serious??

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Perhaps,.....we need to do some more searching and observing... to better understand life, God and ourselves.