

## Corrected Vision

I have terrible eyesight. The summer after second grade, my mother took me to the eye doctor, and it's all been downhill from there. I got my first glasses (Pebbles frames from the Flintstones collection) that summer and wore them until sixth grade. Then I got contact lenses...but not because my mother wanted to relieve me from the social stigma of wearing glasses (and these weren't nice, subtle wireframes, either, folks—think heavy, plastic and brown). No, the optometrist wanted me in contact lenses because my eyesight was getting worse so quickly that he hoped having something physically on my eyeball might slow the changes down. I was excited to get contacts...but I was also worried, because I knew there was something really wrong with my eyes.

Now, at this point I'd worn my glasses for five years. I knew all about scratches and dirty lenses. I knew that screws sometimes come loose and your glasses just fall apart. I even knew that leaving them on the floor while taking a bath was a pretty fair guarantee that I would step on them as I got out—I learned that one the hard way. I'd grown used to them fogging up when I went from the cold winter outdoors into the heated school, and I understood what peripheral vision was...that blurry zone past the frames of my glasses to the sides. What was also clear to me is that I couldn't see

more than six inches in front of my face without my glasses on, and however inconvenient or unattractive they might have been, I couldn't live without them.

So the day came when my mother and I went to the eye doctor and learned how to stick little circles of thin plastic onto my eyeballs...and my world changed. Suddenly, I had peripheral vision again. I could play outside and not worry that my glasses would slide off. I could actually read the labels on the shampoo bottles in the shower (think about it...can't wear glasses in there!). No more worry about breaking my glasses, no more lenses fogging up, no more heavy plastic frames...I was in heaven. My corrected vision gave me a whole new perspective on life...I could finally really see everything around me. My vision was clear, there were no obstacles to what I could see, and I still love that moment when I put that little piece of plastic onto my eyeball and the whole world comes into focus.

Once upon a time, there was a Pharisee named Saul. He was zealous in defending the faith of the Jews, so when he heard that there were people claiming to follow the Messiah, Saul was quick to put a stop to it. One day he was on his way to Damascus to break up a group claiming that a man named Jesus of Nazareth had been the Messiah, when something shocking happened...a bright light shone around him, he fell to the ground, and when

he got up, he couldn't see anything at all. A voice told him, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Get up, go into the city." So Saul went off, and met a man he'd come to kill, and found that his vision was corrected as he was reconciled to Jesus Christ and to his lifelong belief in God. Saul was completely changed, not outwardly, but inwardly, changed in nature and faith. Transformed by his encounter with Jesus Christ, Saul found himself so different from who he was before that he went so far as to take a new name, calling himself Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. And we know that Paul went on to become a kind of missionary priest, founding and supporting faith communities all over the known world, because the power of God had transformed him, reconciled him, reuniting him with God in Jesus Christ.

One of the ways that we think about this holy meal that is the Lord's Supper is as the sacrament of reconciliation. We believe that there is power here at this table to bring about the transformation of lives, to make us truly one with Christ. This is what reconciliation is...being brought back to oneness with God, made new by God's grace. In this grace-filled celebration, we believe that we can encounter Jesus here in some way, can have our hearts and minds and lives changed by the power and presence of Christ. We believe that here we can find reconciliation...but what does that mean for us?

When we are reconciled to God, when in Christ we are brought into right relationship with God, our vision, like Paul's, is corrected. We cease to see with "worldly eyes", distracted by all the busy-ness around us, clouded by a culture of materialism and me-ism and blinded to the work of God we are called to all around us. Instead, reconciliation with God opens our eyes to possibilities all around us, to the grace and mercy of God worked out in the lives of people we know and people we don't, opportunities to make the kingdom of God visible to others as we respond to God's goodness to us.

The hard thing about reconciliation is that it's not about our initiative or even our benefit...it's about coming into God's vision for us and for the world. That means that at the Lord's Table and in the other ways we are reconciled to God, we are transformed not for our own sakes, but for Jesus' sake, and for the sake of reconciling with others, and transforming the world. It's not about correcting our flawed vision of the world, but about bringing others into Christ's vision for the kingdom of God lived out here and now.

When we come to the Table, we often think it's something we do for ourselves, a brief obedience to something in the Bible (something Paul reported in a letter to the Corinthian church, no less), a brief spiritual pick-me-up, a moment for quiet reflection and closeness with God at the altar...and it can be all those things. But when we come to this table in

response to the presence of Christ in our lives, when we are looking for a little vision correction, we come to the table to learn what God is calling us to do in Christ, to be strengthened to do his work in the world, to be changed into the people of God in the kingdom of God. Reconciliation is not a change in us only for our own sakes, but for the sake of what God wants to see in the world...for lives to be changed...for new life to break out among God's beloved.

A large part of Paul's ministry after his conversion experience on the road to Damascus was calling the churches to live into God's transforming, reconciling power in Jesus Christ. He called the churches to support one another, to make real in the world the vision Jesus taught, to participate in God's work in the world with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Paul saw firsthand how we can get in the way of what God wants to do, how we can encounter Christ and leave without reconciliation, how we can leave the table and not bear fruit. In his letters, Paul writes to churches plagued by a lack of unity, by division and cliques and confusion about what the gospel meant, in a world where it was becoming increasingly clear that Christ's return would not happen on their schedule. Paul knew, too, that it is possible for those who have become one with Christ to lose that closeness with God. We come to the Table often so that we can correct our vision against God's

vision, so that we can be reconciled again, so that God can do in us what we cannot: see the world, see ourselves, see our neighbor as God sees them.

Our calling then, is three-fold: to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, to be agents of reconciliation to others so that they might come to share God's vision (Paul called us ambassadors for Christ), and to maintain that sense of vision that comes through our reconciliation. While in the weeks leading up to Easter, we practice a Lenten discipline of self-examination to help us live in the transforming power of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, this is not just a spiritual spring cleaning but a constant need in our lives to reflect on John Wesley's question: how is it with your soul? How do we as Christians reveal God's vision for the kingdom to one another and the world?

What happens when we are reconciled, made new, transformed into those who see with God's vision, is that we are able to see what has been there for us all along: the power, grace, and mercy of God, made real to us by Jesus Christ, and kept alive in us by the Holy Spirit. God's vision has been there all along: through slavery and exodus, through temples and foreign leaders, through persecution and state churches and all the damage that humankind can do to it. Reconciliation makes clear to us that which we

see dimly: God's love, Christ's gift, the Spirit's presence are real for all people and can and will and do change lives and change reality.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he reminds the people called "Christian" of how often it is that we are to seek reconciliation with God: not once, but as often as we eat and drink, an ongoing process of watching ourselves to be sure that our vision is consistent with that of Christ. And just as getting contact lenses revealed to me clarity of sight and a broad field of vision I had not known before, so can our time at this table reveal to us the vision God has for you, and for me, for Ann Street church, and for the world: a world where we are all regarded as God's beloved children, where the lost are found, the hungry are fed, the sick find company and comfort, and where the love and compassion of Jesus Christ are made known in God's people. Here is where our errors are corrected and our sight made right. In this bread, in this cup, lives are changed, souls are set free, our vision is made clear, and we can be made one with the Lord of heaven and earth, who calls us to make his kingdom real for all his children. Let us eat, and drink, and be made one, whole, holy. Amen.