

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Seminarian Brandon Metcalf

Pentecost 11
Saturday, August 7, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, August 8, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

“Snapshot”

Text: Ephesians 4:17-5:2

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” In many cases this is true- it can be a lot easier to see something than to have it described to you. But pictures also have their limitations. They do tell a story, but it’s not a complete story. They show reality in snapshots, of one moment in time, but they don’t show you what happened before to lead to that point, or what’s going to happen after. Pictures are a moment in time, a snapshot. They’re not the whole story.

We’re going to be talking about snapshots today, not in terms of photography, but regarding how we view other people. Because how we see people matters. In our hearts and minds, oftentimes we take a picture, a snapshot of how someone is at a particular moment, and we tend to think that they can’t change. We do this with age- I saw this when I moved away from home to go to college and anytime I came back to visit, even up to this day- I’m shocked by how old some of the kids are. I’ll see a picture of someone graduating high school, and I’ll think, “No, that’s impossible. They’re still in 2nd grade!” My snapshot of them clearly doesn’t match up with who they are now. We do this also in terms of behavior- we take someone’s mistake, turn that into their snapshot, and it

becomes who they are forever. This is increasingly common in our world- that anything you say or do, no matter how long ago can be seen as the single defining moment of your entire life. But most concerning, we can also take snapshots in terms of where people are spiritually. We look at someone who is disconnected from the church and oftentimes that turns into our snapshot of them- we assume that they'll always be that way, that nothing will change. Maybe we've tried reaching out and it hasn't worked. Or it's been such a long time, that you're not sure what the use of trying is. When we assume that they're not going to change, it's easy for us to not only miss who they actually are, but also who they could become.

One of the times where I made this mistake was at a basketball tournament in high school. Our church was hosting a church-league basketball tournament, and so it was all hands on deck in terms of who was helping out. Realizing that God had not given me the spiritual gift of basketball, I decided to serve by working at the scorer's table. One of the first games that I helped out with was...interesting, let's say. Our team was playing an outreach team from one of the other area churches. This outreach team was made up of Bosnian immigrants, which there is a large population of in St. Louis. This church was doing an amazing thing by using basketball to reach out to their neighbors, and yet most of us didn't see it the same way- our snapshot of this team was less positive. The Bosnian team was older, bigger, and rougher than all the other teams. There was one player especially that we were afraid of- I never knew his actual name, but we just called him Goliath. Because he was huge, and intimidating, and he seemed really mean. He didn't speak much English at all, as far as we could tell, and the words that he did know had gotten him a technical foul during the game, which ended up being a very close game that their team lost. Goliath fouled out of the game,

and I know that because I was keeping the official score book, and so they turned to me when he got his fifth foul because I was keeping track, and let's just say I was very glad that there's a scorer's table between me and him because I was not a big guy in high school, and he was well...Goliath. After the game, I duck out of the gym for a moment to grab a drink of water before the next game. As I finish at the drinking fountain, I turn around and there standing behind me, is Goliath. And he's even bigger up close. And they had just lost the game. And I was the one that had to verify that he had fouled out of the game. And there's no one else around. I look around for a possible escape route. The drinking fountains were in the corner, so I didn't have many options. To the right is the women's locker room- can't go in there. To the left is a wall and then the stairwell. The only place I can go is the gap between the stairwell and the wall, and Goliath is big enough that he takes up that whole space. I'm trapped. And he's mad. So I look up and stare death in the face, and Goliath just stares back at me. I'm too afraid to say anything, and so we're locked in this weird staring contest that I assume will be to the death, and all of a sudden Goliath opens his mouth and here's what he says, "You have the bluest eyes I've ever seen." I'm so stunned that I don't even know what to say, but he moves out of the way and I scamper off, rejoicing in the fact that I'm still alive.

I had taken a snapshot of Goliath and assumed that I knew everything about him- based on his size and language and everything else- I had counted him out. Turns out that this outreach basketball ministry was actually doing its job and Goliath was learning about Jesus, and about God's grace. That church saw what I didn't- they looked past outward appearances and they saw Goliath as a child of God. Who needed to hear that message. They didn't see someone that was beyond hope, but someone who was in need of hope. And they boldly shared that

hope with him. Instead of limiting God, or thinking, “there’s no chance that this person will change”, this church simply did their job and made disciples. I learned a lot that day from Bosnian Goliath. When we begin to see people, not through our own snapshots of them, but see them through the eyes of Christ, it makes all the difference.

God invites us to trade in our snapshots for His story of grace- the story that He has invited us into. Listen again to the last verses of our reading from Ephesians 4 and 5: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Notice Paul’s instructions here- forgive as God forgives you, love as Christ loves you, imitate God. In order to see people the way God sees them, we first need to realize how God sees us. God in Christ, has forgiven not just some of your sins, but through His death on the cross, Jesus forgives every single one of them. You are not defined by your worst moment or even your best, but by the cross and the empty tomb. You’re not beyond hope, you’re in need of hope- hope that God gives you in Christ. It’s not about a snapshot, but about a story. The story of grace that God has called you into. The story of His family that He has brought you into. Be imitators of God, as beloved children. Because that’s who you are- a loved, forgiven child of God.

When you see yourself that way- as a loved, forgiven child of God, you begin see others the same way as you imitate your Heavenly Father. Instead of limiting God, and trying to decide for Him whose lives He can or cannot change, we simply do what the church-league basketball team did- see everyone as a child of God too. We forgive as God forgives us, we love how He loves us, we see

people the way God see us. Not just where they are now, but how God could change them.

Think with me for a moment: “How do you respond when something breaks?” Some people see the broken part and think “well that’s useless now” and throw it away. Others see that same broken part and think, “This is worth fixing.” My dad operates with that second mindset- I’m pretty sure that he’s fixed almost everything in our house at one point or another. When something breaks, he sees it as something that is in need of fixing, not something to be tossed aside. Now I don’t have his same gifts- I can’t just look at something and know how to fix it. But I know my dad can. And that relationship changes the way I see things now- I look at something that is broken and I no longer think it’s beyond repair. Instead I think, “I’m sure my dad can fix that.” If one of my son’s toys breaks, my son’s response is, “Let’s have grandpa take a look at it. He can fix it!” In an even greater way, that’s how our relationship with our heavenly Father changes our lives. Instead of looking at the brokenness in our lives or in those around us and thinking that it’s beyond repair, we begin to think, “I can’t fix it, I don’t know what to do....but I’m sure my Dad can fix that.” In fact there’s nothing too broken that God can’t fix it. There’s no one too far gone that your heavenly Father can’t restore them. Because that’s what He does. When you see who God has changed and restored and transformed throughout history, there’s one resounding message: “Don’t count God out.”

“Don’t count God out.” Those are words that one of my favorite professors in college shared with me and I’ve kept them with me ever since. Dr. Moulds had more Scripture memorized than anyone that I know, and he lived out his faith in such a kind and genuine way. He was truly a model of what it looks like to be a man of God. That was my snapshot of Dr. Moulds, and I assumed that he had

always been this way, but come to find out, that was not the case at all. When he was a teenager and young adult, Dr. Moulds told us that he was far away from the church. He had sought after truth in every way except Christianity, and one day the Holy Spirit got a hold of him through the Gospel and it changed his life. And God kept growing that faith, continuing that miracle and this wandering teen became a Christian role model for thousands of students over the years. After sharing his story, Dr. Moulds told us that he's where he is today because the Holy Spirit used people in his life who never gave up on him, even in his years of wandering. These people saw him not as someone beyond hope, but as a child of God in need of hope. And then he told us, "Many of you are going to be working with young people in your careers. Be those people too. When you see kids that are living like I was, don't give up on them. What God did for me, He can do for them. Don't count God out."

Think about the people in your life that you know need to hear that they are a loved child of God. Maybe they used to be in the church and have wandered away. Maybe you've tried for years and nothing has seemed to work. Maybe you just don't know where they're at in their faith walk. Maybe their story up to this point is like Paul, Dr. Moulds, Bosnian Goliath, or any number of people who were far from God at one point. Whatever their status, how you look at that person matters. God is inviting you to imitate your Heavenly Father, to see others the same way that He does- not as someone beyond hope, but someone in need of hope. In need of the hope that you have, the hope that you can share. That you would see past their brokenness and know, "My Dad can fix that." Amen.