

What is the “look of love”?

By now I hope we’ve become familiar with our National Vision Statement. If we wish to take it seriously, it raises some challenging questions for us. Today I invite you to consider the last part of the statement: *to transform Australia one life at a time with the love of Jesus*

It’s no secret that loving others is important to God. What are the 2 greatest commandments in the Bible? (Love God, love others). There are dozens of Bible verses that encourage us to pursue love for others [*you might like to ask people to name some, depending on your group*].

Love thy neighbour. Love others as you love yourself. They’re easy lines to deliver, but difficult to put into practise. People are challenging! When we think about ‘others’ we automatically tend to think ‘others not like me’. And yet, we are all imperfect people, subject to our own biases and prejudices. These things become the lenses we look through – they frame and filter the way we try to love. Very often we are not even aware of how much they colour our view and our opinions – and therefore affect our responses and actions.

What does the Bible have to teach us here? We have no better example, of course, than Jesus Himself. Wherever He went, He specialised in loving people, caring for people, especially the ones overlooked or ignored. Wherever He went, Jesus chose to look through the lenses of love, to see each person individually.

So who did Jesus see, and how did He see them that was so different? In Luke 7 we hear a story about a woman who poured perfume on Jesus’ feet. [*you may like to read the whole story from Luke 7:36-50*]. Simon the Pharisee looked at this woman and he saw a sinful woman – disgraced, impure, degraded, not respectable. Everyone knew she was a prostitute! How terrible! But Jesus looked at the woman and He saw a daughter of the King – one who had discovered faith, who brought a repentant heart, who wanted to express her love extravagantly. One who was totally worth His attention and care.

Has anyone seen the musical or movie *Aladdin*? It’s been touring Australia recently and it’s a great show. The lead character, Aladdin, is described at one point as a ‘diamond in the rough’ – his scruffy exterior conceals a noble person. But other characters in the marketplace dismiss him as “street rat! riff raff!”. It sounds a lot like Simon the Pharisee – “who’s this riff raff? Does Jesus even realise what kind of lowlife she is?”

It’s easy for us to shake our heads & judge the Pharisees, but if I am honest - how often am I distracted by *my* biases? How often am I put off by the superficial, the irritating, the uncomfortable, the challenging aspects of those around me? Do I look through grubby, distorted glasses and see them like Simon saw this woman?

In 1 Samuel 16:7, God tells the prophet Samuel, “The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.”

If Jesus were in a Disney musical - He would look at the Beast, and see the Prince. He’d look at Aladdin and see the ‘diamond in the rough’. *Jesus truly sees each person*. He sees their potential, He sees what is precious and what is perfect. He sees their yet-to-be determined future as clearly as if it was already accomplished (Romans 4:17).

I believe learning to wear the lenses of love is our key to being able to really put the second Great Commandment into practise. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul writes that “we are God’s masterpiece.” Some translations say we are “heaven’s poetry etched on lives!” Every single one of us is a uniquely crafted masterpiece designed for a specific destiny and journey. When God looks at us, His children, I believe that is what He sees. It’s what Jesus saw in this woman. Not a sinner, but a daughter of Heaven. Jesus looked at Peter, and saw not a fisherman, but a disciple and bold preacher. He looked at Matthew and saw not an outcast tax collector, but a gospel writer!

What does God see when He looks at you and me? Can we see that? Sometimes if we are honest we have to ask the question - do we want to see that? It can be easier to fall back on doing all the right things - even the good things, on saying the right things - even with the best intentions. It allows a

safe distance between 'us' and 'them'. But when Jesus chose to engage with others, to see them and to love them - He held nothing back, not even His own life. Are we willing to get up close and personal, and learn to look through love coloured lenses?

There's one more person we need to learn to see through the lenses of love – our self. The second Great Commandment says “you must love your neighbour in the same way you love yourself”. Maybe one reason that we often struggle to see other people as they truly are is because we struggle to ourselves as we truly are. A child of God – beloved and chosen – heaven's poetry etched on a life. This is who we are!

Today, let's celebrate our true identity. Let's embrace our own transformation, and learn to see ourselves and others as Jesus sees us – through the lenses of love.

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Reflection questions/response options:

- *God, how do You see me and who do You see me becoming?*
- *God, how do You see those around me and who do You see them becoming?*
- Listen to one of the reflection songs provided in resource list.
- Revisit the rose coloured glasses and the truth words they uncover.