

Centre Congregational Church, U.C.C.  
Sunday, 2 September 2018

“Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall...”

Hebrew Scripture: 4:1-2, 6-9  
Christian Scripture: James 1:17-27

Martin Luther initiated the Reformation. One of its mantras was *Sola Scriptura* or ‘Scripture Alone’. So, it is ironic that Luther labelled the one of the books of the Bible, James, an “Epistle of Straw”. Meaning, Luther did not give the book of James much credit; in fact, he wished it to be excised from the canon. The reason why Luther called the book of James ‘the Epistle of Straw’ is because it contradicted in key areas a second manta of the Reformation: ‘Justification by Faith, *alone*’. The book of James emphasized that ‘faith without works was dead’ (James 2:17). Of course, for generations biblical scholars have performed theological gymnastics to wed Luther and James. But, the fact remains that Luther had grave difficulties with James’ perspective - it was too Catholic. Let us look explore the book of James this morning and let you decide.

I brought a mirror here this morning. Unlike my battered and bruised Gandhi image, it survived the trip across the Atlantic unscathed. I enjoy mirrors. I enjoy them because I look so H-O-T in

them or I enjoy them because I am a bit vain - you decide. Which reminds me of a news report I recently read that told of a certain private school in Washington that was recently faced with a unique problem. A number of twelve-year-old girls were beginning to use lipstick and would apply it in the bathroom.



That was fine, but after they applied their lipstick, they would press their lips to the mirror leaving dozens of little lip prints. Every night, the janitor would remove them and the next day the girls would put them back. Finally, the principal decided that something had to be done. She called all the girls to the bathroom and met them there with the janitor. She explained that all the lip prints were causing a major problem for the janitor who had to clean the mirrors every night. To demonstrate how difficult it had been to clean the mirrors, she asked the janitor to show the girls how much effort was required. He took out a long-handled squeegee, dipped it in the toilet, and cleaned the mirror with it. Since then, there have been no lip prints on the mirror.

**Mirrors, they show us who we are and how we appear.**



Remember the fairy tale ‘Snow White’? Remember the evil stepmother’s questioning of the mirror: “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” We all hope to look good in mirrors. Many of us check them several times a time. Today, we look in the mirror frequently because our looks often change from day to day or hour to hour. Yet, in first century Palestine, mirrors were so rare and folks had so little access to them that folks often forgot what they looked like since they last looked in a mirror. Can you imagine actually forgetting what your image looks like?



Speaking of image, in the Hebrew scriptures it states that we are all made in the “image of God” (*imago dei*, Genesis 1:26-27). So, it is God who we are to resemble. Of course, (as we said last

week) God has no body, and no face. So, it is the Spirit of God that we are to resemble, that we are to emulate.

So, let us ask ourselves this morning, ‘when we look in the mirror, do we hear from our mouths that which God would speak’? Do we see our hands doing that which God’s hands do? Do we express compassion as God’s expresses compassion? Are we forgiving as God forgives?

If we are not quite sure what God says, or if we wonder what God’s hands do, or if we speculate to what extent are we to demonstrate compassion and forgiveness, we need only to read the stories of Jesus. Jesus said, “Love your enemies”. Jesus touched the most despised. Jesus had compassion for the widows and the children. Jesus prayed for his executors. When we look in the mirror, do we see and hear and feel the will of God as shown through Jesus Christ?

Let us listen to a contemporary song, by Michael Jackson, and see if God might be speaking to you through him.



## Man in the Mirror

### Michael Jackson

I'm gonna make a change,  
For once I'm my life  
It's gonna feel real good,  
Gonna make a difference  
Gonna make it right

As I, turn up the collar on  
My favorite winter coat  
This wind is blowing my mind  
I see the kids in the streets,  
With not enough to eat  
Who am I to be blind?  
Pretending not to see their needs

A summer disregard, a broken bottle top  
And a one man soul  
They follow each other on the wind ya' know  
'Cause they got nowhere to go  
That's why I want you to know

I'm starting with the man in the mirror  
I'm asking him to change his ways  
And no message could have been any clearer  
If you want to make the world a better place  
(If you want to make the world a better place)  
Take a look at yourself, and then make a change  
(Take a look at yourself, and then make a change)  
(Na na na, na na na, na na, na nah)

I've been a victim of a selfish kind of love  
It's time that I realize  
That there are some with no home, not a nickel to loan  
Could it be really me, pretending that they're not alone?

A willow deeply scarred, somebody's broken heart  
And a washed-out dream  
(Washed-out dream)  
They follow the pattern of the wind ya' see  
'Cause they got no place to be

That's why I'm starting with me  
(Starting with me!)

I'm starting with the man in the mirror (Ooh!)  
I'm asking him to change his ways (Ooh!)  
And no message could have been any clearer  
If you want to make the world a better place  
(If you want to make the world a better place)  
Take a look at yourself, and then make a change  
(Take a look at yourself, and then make a change)

I'm starting with the man in the mirror (Ooh!)  
I'm asking him to change his ways  
(Change his ways, ooh!)  
And no message could have been any clearer  
If you want to make the world a better place  
Take a look at yourself and then make that  
(Take a look at yourself and then make that)  
Change!

I'm starting with the man in the mirror  
(Man in the mirror, oh yeah!)  
I'm asking him to change his ways  
(Better change!)  
No message could have been any clearer  
(If you want to make the world a better place)

You can't close your, your mind!  
(Then you close your, mind!)  
That man, that man, that man, that man  
With the man in the mirror  
(Man in the mirror, oh yeah!)  
That man, that man, that man,  
I'm asking him to change his ways  
(Better change!)  
You know, that man  
No message could have been any clearer  
If you want to make the world a better place  
(If you want to make the world a better place)  
Take a look at yourself and then make the change  
(Take a look at yourself and then make the change)  
Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!  
Na na na, na na na, na na, na nah (Ooh)  
Oh no, no no

I'm gonna make a change  
It's gonna feel real good!  
Come on!  
(Change)  
Just lift yourself  
You know  
You've got to stop it,  
Yourself!  
(Yeah! Make that change!)  
I've got to make that change, today! Hoo!  
(Man in the mirror)

You got to  
You got to not let yourself  
Brother, Hoo!  
(Yeah! Make that change!)  
You know I've got to get  
That man, that man

You've got to  
You've got to move! Come on!  
Come on!  
You got to

Stand up! Stand up! Stand up!  
(Yeah! Make that change)  
Stand up and lift yourself, now!  
(Man in the mirror)  
Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!  
Aw!  
(Yeah! Make that change!)  
Gonna make that change

Come on!  
You know it!  
You know it!  
You know it!  
You know it  
(Change)  
Make that change.

Songwriters: Glen Ballard / Siedah Garrett

Man in the Mirror lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc, Universal Music Publishing Group, BMG Rights Management

**Friends, if we are the hands and feet, the heart and spirit of Jesus in the world today, let us not look into the mirror and forget who we are as people of faith. We are made in the ‘image of God’. Do not forget what that looks like. The author of James states, “Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they look like!”**

**This week, a great American hero was honoured following his death: Senator John McCain.**



In his farewell address, I hear John McCain asking me as a citizen of the United States to look in the mirror and not forget who I am. I heard John McCain asking me as a Christian, as a member of Centre Congregational Church, to not forget who I am. McCain asked all of us to look in the mirror and remember our ideals. McCain said in his last words to you and me:

“We are [...] a nation of ideals, not blood and soil. We are blessed and are a blessing to humanity when we uphold and advance those ideals at home and in the world. [...] We weaken our greatness when we confuse our patriotism with tribal rivalries [...]. We weaken it when we hide behind walls, rather than tear them down, when we doubt the power of our ideals, rather than trust them to be the great force of change that they have always been”.<sup>1</sup>

Hmmmm. I can say the same about the Gospel and about the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, September 30, 2018.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/27/us/politics/john-mccain-farewell-statement.html>

Our country is a very powerful country. There are three ways to use power. One is to lord against others so as to gain more power. Jesus spoke against this. Another is to use power to insulate oneself from those who have little or none. Jesus also spoke against this. Another use of power, the one Jesus embodied in his ministry, is one in which power is used to empower others, giving them hope and a future that is life-fulfilling.

Let us not forget who we are. Let us not forget to whom we belong. Let us not look into the mirror this morning and then leave forgetting in whose image we are made and therefore how we should respond to the world.

This was the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded: 'Amen'!