**Grounded: You Are What God Sees**

**I Samuel 16:1-13**

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 I remember taking a pastoral psychology class and the professor talking about filters – how we filter information without consciously knowing what we are doing. As I remember it, the discussion was in reference to how we choose to see other people, especially when it comes to choosing a mate. There are so many people that we will never truly get to know or consider as a possible mate because whatever filters our subconscious uses rejects them before we ever get a chance to truly know them or our compatibility.

 I really do not recall any detail about that conversation so I did a quick web search to see if “filters” comes up in any discussion of psychology. I ran across one website on “Visual Thinking Magic,” which doesn’t lend a lot to this conversation, but it had some interesting pieces of information.

 It claims that we are bombarded with 2 million bits of information every second. Our conscious brains can only process 134 bits of that 2 million. So if you are ever feeling overwhelmed, there is probably a good reason.

 What happens is that we apply filters in order to cope with that much information. These filters delete, distort, and generalize the information in order to help us to make sense of the world around us.

 When it comes to getting close enough to someone to actually know them on a very personal level there are layers of filters that we move through, which is what we were talking about in the pastoral psych class. The fact that most of us were young and single probably made the topic a bit more interesting.

 The first filter is, of course, physical. We all have personal tastes. Are you attracted to male or female? Some people prefer tall stature; others short. Some prefer slender bodies; others like a little more flesh on the bones. Short or long hair? Dark or light complexion?

 After moving through the physical filters, we allow ourselves to get close enough to begin using other filters screening for interests, values and dreams. Again, we usually apply these filters without even thinking about it, but they allow us to move ever closer to another to discover compatibility. Sometimes we will miss out on some very lovely people with whom we would have been very compatible, but earlier filters kept us from getting close enough.

 There was a movie out several years ago called “Shallow Hal.” I know nothing about it but the preview. This is not a recommendation for the movie. It stars Jack Black, and I happen to like Jack Black. The premise is that Hal is pretty shallow and only dating women based on their looks. Then he is hypnotized so that the only thing he sees is the woman’s inner beauty. His friend thinks he has gone of the deep end because he begins dating women that would not have made it through his former filter that screened for physical attraction.

 Filters are necessary to get through all the information we need to deal with. They help simplify our decisions. That is not a bad thing. They help us make judgment. It becomes harmful when our judgment becomes judgmental. Being judgmental, I would contend, is when we do not see the other as God sees them.

 The stories of King David from the Old Testament create a case in point. Saul was the first king of the united Israel around the 11th century BC. This marked the transition from a tribal society to statehood. The Israelis wanted a king and God revealed to the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul as king. It was done in private, but it came to fruition. Many years down the road, though, Saul quit listening to God and quit heeding God’s will. God informed Prophet Samuel that it was time to anoint a new king and sent him to Jesse of Bethlehem to find a new king among his sons.

 You know the story. Jesse parades his sons before the prophet Samuel. First the oldest, Eliab, and when Samuel sees him, he is instantly convinced that this is the one whom God will choose as the next king. You can tell by the way he looks. He is tall and strong. His appearance is commanding. But God said, “No, no, no. Not so quickly.” Then comes son Abinadab, and God says, “Not this one either.” Then Shammah and four others, and each time God says this is not the one.

 God told Samuel, “Do not look on the appearance, or on the height of the stature. I do not see as mortals see (i.e. I do not use the filters that humans use). They look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

 Jesse paraded his seven sons in front of the prophet, and not one of them is to be king. Samuel is a little frustrated. God had told him one of Jesse’s sons would be anointed as the next king. Samuel asks, “Are all your sons here? Is this it?” Jesse replies, “Well, there is little David, the youngest and the runt of the family. He is out taking care of the sheep. But he can’t be who you are looking for.” Exasperated, Samuel says, “Go get him!”

 Sure enough, this was God’s chosen. This little shepherd boy is to be the next king of Israel. So Samuel anoints him in the front all his older brothers and father. What humans would have rejected, because of outward appearances, God has anointed.

 That wasn’t the only time that David was misjudged based on filters that we use to screen out those who superficially don’t meet our standards. You might remember the time when the Philistines challenged the Israelites to a one-on-one battle for all the marbles. Israel was encamped ready to do battle with the Philistines when Goliath of Gath steps out into the valley between the two encampments and shouts up to the Israelites, “Look, we can make this quick and simple. Send your best man down here to fight me. If he kills me, we will be your servants. If I kill him, you will be our servants.”

 You know this story too. Goliath is huge. The Bible describes him as over nine feet tall, and he is well armed. Obviously this is a no brainer for the Philistines. If they could goad the Israelites with this challenge, there is almost no way the Philistines could lose. And it got the Israelites shaking in their boots.

 Now David had been sent by his father to get food to his older brothers who were fighting with King Saul. David heard the threat of Goliath and the Israelites’ fear and he was indignant. “Who are these uncircumcised so-and-sos that you fear them? Initially the men of the army ignored him because he was this little runt kid, but he shamed them for their lack of faith. Finally, the army of Israelites said, “Fine! You go off and battle this Goliath.” You know how this ended. One well placed rock from his sling and the young boy, David, took down the Giant Philistine.

 Again, the judgment of outward appearance proved wrong. It is a lesson we are very slow to learn. How often do we misjudge persons because our filters screen them out for their height or breadth, their skin color or accent, who they love, or even how they have come to know the revelation of God in their lives? We forget that every single person is a creation of God, loved by God, and, therefore, have the divine within them.

 It is tragic when we deny others their God-given sacredness, because they do not fall within our taste, or our ability to understand them. But here is something even more tragic. There are too many people, and perhaps all of us at times, who believe the judgment others lay upon them. Instead of rejoicing in the great diversity of God’s creation, we judge ourselves because we don’t fit into the narrow conception of acceptability. We’re not handsome enough. We’re not smart enough. We’re not wealthy enough. Society has developed filters to define who is in and who is out; who is acceptable and who is not. There is nothing that denies God more than that, because it denies the divine that is in every human being. And then we begin to doubt the divine that is in us.

 The whole ministry of Jesus, I believe, was set in motion to circumvent this sin of humanity – the belief that not everyone is of equal value. And so Jesus specifically ministered to those whom society pushed aside – the week, the lonely, the poor, the maligned, the ill, the ones who had no social status – to remind them that they were as valued by God (if not more so) because they did not get the breaks in life.

 There are many ways to interpret the death and resurrection of Jesus and the meaning of atonement. But one way to understand it is that even Jesus was rejected by the myopic filters of the world. But God never will reject you. You are a son or daughter of God because that is the way God created you. That is how God sees you and there is no one who can take that away from you.

 So the next time you look in the mirror, look deep. Look deep enough to see what God sees. You are a part of the creation that God called good. Now that doesn’t make you better than anyone else, but it does make you equal. Believe it!

 I pray that it will be true in your life and in mine. Amen.