

# People Eyes

The Rev. Dr. E.  
Stanley Ott

Luke 18:35-43

**Sermon Series:**  
**Journey of Transfor-**  
**mation**

*Jesus saw with  
people eyes of  
compassion.*

I love Palm Sunday! It's a day of celebration. It's a day that is all about hope. It is one of the most festive days in the life of the church. What fun to see the kids singing, waving their palm branches. They help us remember that first Palm Sunday with the incredible complexity of that day. In the months leading up to Palm Sunday Jesus had become increasingly popular because people realized Jesus actually cared about them. He had eyes for people—what my friend Chuck Miller calls “people eyes,” and no matter the condition in which he found people, he offered them hope and healing. He looked at the dead son of a widow living in the town of Nain and raised the boy to life and gave him back to his mother. With his people eyes, he saw the suffering daughter of a woman from the area of Canaan and gave her back to her mother. His people eyes saw the suffering of Martha and Mary on the death of their brother, Lazarus, and he raised Lazarus back to life and returned him to his sisters. Jesus saw with people eyes of compassion.

We learn from Matthew that when Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, people eyes for them, because they were harassed and helpless. To be harassed means to be worn down, to be exhausted, and to be hassled.

I bought a new laptop recently and when opening it in a normal way, one of the hinges broke. The repair center said it would take them a month to fix it. That felt harassing.

My wife, Ann Marie, was sitting on the sofa, her feet on the coffee table, reading a book. Her husband (best to leave him nameless here), filled with affection, gets up and sits on her leg, gently he thought, to give her a kiss and tears the meniscus in her knee. That's being harassed. As my friend Jack Stewart told me, “Stan, Ann Marie is suffering from a knee-jerk reaction!” To be harassed is to be hassled and worn down. To be helpless is to be thrown down, smashed down by some situation in life—you lose your job, you face a difficult illness, a relationship in your life is torn and painful. Jesus saw people then and he sees you and me today with his people eyes—he sees us the way we really are on the inside, and he feels compassion for us.

We see the people eyes of Jesus on vivid display as Palm Sunday draws near. Jesus is on his final journey to Jerusalem. He knows the trip will end with his arrest and crucifixion. He approaches the town of Jericho, fifteen miles outside of Jerusalem. There is a lot on his mind. He could have ignored the people of Jericho as he dwelt on the events about to take place in Jerusalem, and as he paid attention to his

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disciple buddies who sought his attention. A blind man is sitting near the road. Mark tells us his name is Bartimaeus. He hears the noise of the crowd walking with Jesus and asks what's going on, and they tell him, "Jesus of Nazareth is walking by!" Bartimaeus immediately begins to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." The people around him try to get him to shut up but he cries all the louder and Jesus stops and looks at him with his people eyes. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asks. "Lord, let me see again," and Jesus says, "Receive your sight, your faith has saved you," and Bartimaeus could see again. He literally had received eyes from Jesus and he now looked through the people eyes of Jesus in his own head.

As Jesus continues into Jericho, a small man of immense wealth by the name of Zacchaeus climbs up into a tree to see Jesus. Jesus comes to the place, looks up, and, with his people eyes, he sees Zacchaeus. "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." People start to object because Zacchaeus is rich because he was a dishonest tax collector, but in the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus is a changed man, and he receives from Jesus the people eyes of Jesus. He says, "Half of my wealth I give to the poor and I will repay four times to people what I cheated them out of." Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house!"

Jesus arrives in the little town of Bethany on the outskirts of

Jerusalem on the night before Palm Sunday. He goes to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, his dear friends of the heart. A dinner is given in Jesus' honor. Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead, is at table with Jesus. Martha serves. Mary pours a pint of extremely expensive perfume on Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair. Jesus knew she was anointing him for his burial. She had people eyes for Jesus himself and knew he was under great pressure, sensed he, himself, was about to be harassed and helpless.

The next day, Jesus and his twelve apostle disciples begin the walk from Bethany to Jerusalem. A colt is brought to him. They put their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. People have heard about the way Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and the crowd grew like wildfire, people trying to catch a glimpse of Jesus and celebrating him. They threw their cloaks on the ground ahead of him and waving palm branches cried, "Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, hosanna in the highest." It's a wonderful moment for Jesus as people offer him affirmation, adulation and honor. You know Jesus loved the way the people were loving him.

They come around a bend or over a small hill in the road and suddenly, there it is, the Holy City, the beautiful city of Jerusalem and the great temple. How do you think Jesus felt at that moment with the crowd cheering him and his twelve disciples walking along smiling with everyone? I'd have thought Jesus

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would see the Holy City and smile with joy, but instead we read, “As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it” (Luke 19:41). What? He wept over it? Why? He said, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will... crush you to the ground... because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.” Jesus sees the Holy City with his people eyes. He knows that many people then, as some of us today, choose not to embrace Jesus as the Son of God who claims our faith and allegiance, and he knows they will suffer as a result, and he cries for them. When you have people eyes and see the true condition of those who are harassed and helpless, it tears up your heart just like it tore up his heart.

One of the gigantic truths this portion of God’s Big Story teaches us is that Jesus looks at you and me with his people eyes. He sees your gifts and strengths. He sees where you are flawed. He sees where you are struggling. He sees where you are drowning, and he wants you to know he is there for you.

A few weeks ago, Philippe Prosper offered a Minute for Witness here at VPC. His home country is Haiti. Philippe told of watching a news report after the earthquake of a fifteen-year-old girl who had been trapped under a fallen house for several days and the people outside had been unable

to free her. Philippe could hear the girl speaking in the native language and she was saying, “Jesus, why don’t you see me?” In her desperate plight she saw only what she could see which was darkness and assumed God wasn’t seeing her either. Do you ever feel like that? Sometimes we are blind to the fact God sees us and cares.

In the first half of the Book of Lamentations (the title alone tells you he wasn’t having a good day), Jeremiah says things like, “Gone is my glory, and all I hoped for from the Lord.” Sometimes we don’t think Jesus sees us. But Jeremiah continues, “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Jeremiah makes a “faith-shift” and, though he cannot see God working, he trusts God by faith to see him and to work. In the news story Philippe spoke of, the young girl was rescued from her home and Philippe could hear her father speaking of Jesus. He, too, had made a faith-shift on behalf of his daughter. You can make that faith-shift and know that Jesus always sees you and that he sees you with his people eyes.

Something else we realize from the story of Palm Sunday is that just as Mary poured expensive perfume on the feet of Jesus, just as she had received the people eyes of Jesus to see the people as harassed and helpless, so you and I are to receive the people eyes of Jesus, too. Jesus gave those eyes to blind Bartimaeus and to repentant Zacchaeus, and he will

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give them to you as you trust him. People eyes are shepherd eyes. They see the hurting and comfort them. People eyes see the person who is depressed, who is lonely, who is anxious, and people eyes see the person hungry for God, eager to grow in faith and offer to all of them the encouragement of Jesus.

Now, I have to say we are not born with people eyes. We tend to see only what we want to see. We have buddy eyes that only see the people we know and are comfortable with. We have program activity eyes and get so involved with whatever activity we are engaged in we don't even see the people who are right next to us as people who are harassed and helpless, worn down and thrown down, as I assure you they are just as we are.

During the month of March some years ago, Ann Marie and I felt the need of a little getaway in the middle of a long winter, and we borrowed a friend's cottage on beautiful Lake Freeman in central Indiana. Our son, Lee, was nearly two years old at the time. One morning, I was lounging around on the sofa in my pajamas, reading the newspaper. Lee was playing with his toys, and Ann Marie was drinking a cup of coffee, gazing out the picture window at the beautiful winter lake scene. At one point she said, "Look, two teenagers are paddling by in a canoe." I said, "Oh" without looking up from my paper. A little later Ann Marie said, "I think those boys are

in trouble." I said, "Oh?" while continuing to read the comic pages. "Yes," she said, "they are in the middle of the lake and they are in the water."

I said, "Well, they are probably practicing a routine I remember learning in Boy Scouts where you roll a canoe over and get back into it if you fall out." She said, "In the winter? With winter coats on? And they are treading water a dozen feet away from their canoe. I think you'd better check on them." I was loving just lounging around. Could this really be a problem? "Oh alright," I said graciously. I go to the back door, open it, and immediately hear the words wafting across the lake, "Help! Help!" Oh boy! I start to dash out the door when I realize I am only wearing my pajamas. The well-dressed hero simply cannot go running around in pajamas. I throw on a pair of jeans and run outside looking for a boat.

I see a rowboat turned upside down at the water's edge of the next-door neighbor's property. I run down and flip the boat over. No oars. All this time I hear "help, help," and the canoe is drifting farther and farther from the boys. Looking wildly around, I discover two oars leaning against the wall of the neighbor's house. Dashing up to grab them, I see in their family room window that whole family sitting around a table, I wave at them, grab their oars and dash down to the boat, insert the oars into the oarlocks, push off and jump in. By this time my adrenaline is pumping a hundred gallons a second, and I found it

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impossible to steer the boat in a straight line, so zig-zagging, rowing madly, I head out for the two boys.

When I reached the first boy, I remembered life-saving training to the effect that when you lay hold of a drowning person he or she may grab hold of you in the panic of the moment and pull you in, so I braced myself in the boat and reached out for the boy. I needn't have worried. They were so tired from treading water in their water-logged winter clothes and the water was so extremely cold they had zero energy. I had to pull them into the boat, hand over fist, like pulling sacks of lifeless potatoes on board. After I pulled in the second boy, I began to row to the shore and I could hear sirens wailing. The family whose boat I had taken had seen the situation immediately and had called the paramedics. And I thought to myself, "I'm glad I have blue jeans over the pajamas!" Upon reaching the shore, the paramedics took the boys and wrapped them in special blankets to combat the effects of hypothermia from the freezing water.

The next morning, I picked the newspaper off the front porch to discover the headlines in one-inch block black letters, "West Lafayette Man (that was me) Saves Boys!" Pretty Cool! I could have walked around all proud of myself except for two things. First, whose eyes saw the boys and realized they were in trouble, who had people eyes? Ann Marie! Not me. I had program activity eyes. I'm

reading the comics, leave me alone! Second, my hubris, my ego in taking the thirty seconds to put on a pair of jeans could easily have cost those two boys their lives as they tried to keep treading in freezing water while wearing winter coats.

It is easy to have buddy eyes and only pay attention to the people close to us, or to have program eyes and only pay attention to the activity we are engaged in and miss the people who are around us and to see them as harassed and helpless. On his way through Jericho and into the Holy City, Jesus could have had buddy eyes only focusing on his twelve apostles, he could have had program-activity eyes, only thinking about the coming betrayal and crucifixion, but Jesus showed his people eyes. Ask Jesus to give you his people eyes to see through his eyes what he sees when he looks at members of your family or your friends or your co-workers or your neighbors or the person you are estranged from and angry with or have a difference of opinion with, the person whom you bump into on the Metro or in a store or as you simply live life. You can even look at yourself with the people eyes of Jesus and know that he loves you no matter what!

Many years after that episode on Lake Freeman, the phone rang. The caller said, "My name is Kevin Denny. I receive a lot of email and someone forwarded a note with the name E. Stanley Ott on it and when I saw your name, I recognized it as the name of the man who pulled my teenage brother, Rick, out of Lake Freeman thirty years ago and I

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wondered if that was you? When I told him that I was the man, Kevin and I both choked up. Kevin told me that his brother, Rick Denny, was 45-years-old and had been in the Navy for 28 years where he was a Master Chief. He had led an honorable and fruitful life. Then I received an email from Rick, himself. He said, “Had it not been for a lot of divine intervention, my opportunity to give back would not have been possible.” He asked me to attend his retirement ceremony from the Navy. When you act on people eyes—whether they are your people eyes (the gift of Jesus to you) or those in another person, as I experienced that day, know that it is God who will work through you in people’s lives.

God is so very good. Whatever is happening in your life, no matter what is going on in your life, no matter the level of success, flaw or failure in you, no matter the nature of the challenges before you, Jesus sees you with his people eyes of compassion and loves you more than your next breath. And he is looking out of your own eyes at the people around you in just the same way!

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