

## A New Perspective

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Gates Presbyterian Church

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Jeremiah 17:5-10, Psalm 1 and Luke 6:17-26

A little over a year ago, Sally's Subaru, with close to 120,000 miles on the odometer, but on which we depend for hard winter driving, needed a great deal of maintenance and repair. We are pleased with the car we purchased as a replacement. Well, ... we were pleased, until the last couple of weeks when Sally experienced difficulty in snow and slush. A week ago, the car couldn't make it up a slight incline just shy of our home in Arcade. There were two inches of fresh snow and the road beneath was icy, but the car should have made it. In the end, we found neighbors who live a quarter of a mile away and asked if we could park in their drive so as to tote everything to the house wearing our snowshoes. Instead, they graciously offered their four-wheel drive truck so that we only had to trek fifty yards from the road to our house.

That still left the problem of the car's poor traction. The problem was with that the tires were not made for snow. Sally decided the best solution was to purchase four new wheels with aggressive snow tires with a smaller diameter rim and narrower tread. As it turned out, that is what Bill Wooden did on Barbara's car. On Friday morning, the men at Haag's made the switch. At one point, Bill came out to tell me that not only were the tires not suited for snow - but that the front left tire was worn down to the wear bars. With only 12,006 miles on the car, that was far more wear than one would expect. It was agreed I check my warranty and take the worn tire back to the dealer.

This brings us to a discussion on human perspective. Pulling the warranty information from the glove box, I read that there was a 100% replacement guaranty in the first twelve months of ownership. "Grrr," I thought, this is the thirteenth month. There is a sliding scale for the next five years, but there is also a long list of exceptions, exclusions, proofs of maintenance, proof of good care (including inflation - how exactly does one *prove* to a company that tires were inflated properly?). Despite my bravado, I do not like confrontation, and I felt one brewing. But, I dutifully took the tire to the dealership. Sure enough, the lady behind the service desk starting talking about how long we had owned the car, asked if we had hit a pothole or a curb, and, as I worked hard to smile and not glower, told me that the fact that there were four new wheels on the car probably meant they could not verify the alignment and other such information. She asked me to go to the waiting room and sit while they determined what to do.

Sit? Ralph? I took my cell phone out of my pocket and called Sally to ask her how adamant I should be when they denied our claim for compensation for this worn tire. When summoned back to the service desk, I steeled myself to be both polite and firm, braced myself, even found myself putting one hand on the counter - now don't get me wrong, this was still, in the grand scheme of things, not a big deal - but I was not prepared for what came next.

"Sir," she said, "the other front tire isn't much better than the one you showed me and we think you are owed four new tires." .....

Oh.

I don't believe any of you can predict what I said next. .... "But it is beyond the first year's full warranty, you don't owe me that!" ....

"No," she replied, "I think these tires are far too worn for their age. The tire company owes you at least two and perhaps four new tires."

Now I am not going to publicly beat myself up any more than I already have done inside my own head, but what was the genesis of my expecting-the-negative perspective? Here, just a week before, Sally and I experienced grace from neighbors who offered their truck for us to use, there are ample examples of grace and love in this family we call Gates Presbyterian Church, and there I stood, having scoffed at human nature to the point that I expected, yes expected trouble - where none was to be had.

On the one hand, let us acknowledge that I could have been right - the people at the dealership could have blamed the tire's tread on a whole host of things - and they certainly could have upheld the twelve month rule, but on the other hand ..... does this not suggest I take a hard look at my own perspective - particularly as I prepared to discuss that issue with you?

For a countermeasure to my attitude at that dealership, I didn't have to go any further than our words from the Old Testament today. The first Psalm of David, written more than three thousand years ago, a translation of which we just sang includes these words:

Happy are those who do not ... sit in the seat of scoffers.

Great! Isn't that exactly what I had just done – scoffed prematurely, predicted that I would be greeted with cynicism and pessimism? Who was being the cynic? It was I! My perspective was the one out of whack, out of alignment, in need of adjustment, perhaps in need of replacement! And here I am confronted with today's words of David composed a thousand years before the birth of Christ – repeated by Jeremiah four hundred years later (part of which comprised our Call to Worship) - and a quote on the front of our worship bulletin chosen five days before my little episode at the car dealership that suggests that our attitude shapes the “outer aspects of our lives.” [William James].

The words “physician heal thyself” come to mind!

When we use the Latin phrase “Imago Dei,” and remind ourselves that we are made in the image of God, does that not suggest that part of being made in the image of God means that our perspective be that of the Almighty – that we have seeds implanted in our souls and minds that would have us look at the world and situations through the lens of our Creator?

Reality check! There is much in life that invites us to look askance at our world, a world torn by civil strife, war, disease, hunger, dissension, less than gracious behavior, and cynicism that seems almost contagious. However, we also recognize that God constantly comes to us as a human race and cajoles us and calls us back to the perspective that would be ours of God.

The good news is that God loves us enough to never give up on us – to not give up on us as individuals or as the human race. The less than good news is that God must constantly work to have us come around to the Almighty's perspective! As wonderful are the words of Scripture, is

it not telling that over the course of nearly two thousand years, from Abraham to Jesus, God had to remind the chosen people as often as God did? As stirring as Psalm 1 is an expression of God's ways, Jeremiah had to repeat the words – as though they were new – four hundred years later and then Jesus had to rework those words in His teachings and ministry six hundred years after Jeremiah – rework the promises of God with words like the beatitudes we read this morning. And here we are, three thousand years after David and two thousand years after Jesus' earthly ministry in need of reminding *again*. Is that not telling both of God's continued grace – but also of how we had better find ways to change our perspective so that the time-honored and *old* perspectives of God might be *renewed* in us today? And those words as spoken by Jesus as found this morning in the sixth chapter of Luke and first said two thousand years ago, ... do they not still challenge to the status quo?

No matter the circumstances in our lives – here in the United States, in the Middle East – everywhere around the world, circumstances that invite pessimism and cynicism – our perspective is still to be one of hope – yes *hope* grounded in the optimism that God's ways will finally break through, that we will learn how to live as one people on this globe – despite our continued embrace of divisiveness. No matter how determined if not sure we might be that people are only out for selfish gain, that nations will never learn the ways of peace and grace, the suspicion that year-old warranties mean things are going to break in the 367<sup>th</sup> day ... and prove that we are like those who “sit in the seat of the scoffers,” ... God comes to us, shakes us, and compels us to look at the world differently, to put on a different set of glasses, and, while not rejecting the harsher realities of life that so many experience, work hard to be part of the solution – the solution that compels us to be driven by God's perspective – one which invites us to be a people of peace, grace, hope, faith, reconciliation and love.

Part of the solution is found in looking beyond ourselves, indeed to the sisters and brothers in faith with whom we might learn the ways of God and embrace the new perspective which would be ours of God. Is the mutual ministry we share as Gates Presbyterian Church and the wonderful partnerships we have with the people of St. Joseph's, Jamaica, Guatemala and elsewhere around this nation and globe not tangible and visceral affirmations of our desire to be one community, one people – who might lean on each other, learn from each other? Most importantly, can we not learn from those with whom we are in partnership, learn how people with far less than we in material goods do more than just manage – but instead finds ways to be hope-filled and grace-filled despite their supposed needs?

And do the words of the second and third stanza of our closing hymn stir us, challenge us, cajole us – perhaps even shame us?

Lo! The hosts of evil round us scorn Thy Christ, assail Thy ways! From the fears that long have bound us free our hearts to faith and praise.

Cure Thy children's warring madness, bend our pride to Thy control; shame our wanton selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.

.... God's perspective is as old as creation – is not really all that new – but if it is new news to us, let us embrace God's perspective, cling to it, work against human nature that makes us scoff if not be scornful, and with God's perspective as a beacon, be the people God calls us to be!

Amen!

