



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School  
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

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**Second Sunday of Advent**

**December 8, 2019**

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**“Without Bias”**

*(Isaiah 11:3-4)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge” (Isaiah 11:3-4).*

*Every day, Everywhere, By Everyone,...sharing  
the grace of the Good Shepherd.*

**Collect:** Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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We all have biases. In academic circles, the more complex and difficult a research paper is to understand, the better the chances it will be published. The bias is so strong that some engineering students decided to test it. They intentionally wrote a research article that made no sense whatsoever. But they sprinkled it liberally with impressive technical jargon and confusing terminology. They made it look professional too, with ample tables and graphs, footnotes and references, all the while making sure it was completely non-sensical. Then they submitted it for publication in professional periodicals. The results? Not only was the bogus paper accepted for publication: it actually won awards, and the authors were invited to present the paper at the next conference! Take home point? In academic circles, the more complex and impenetrable an article is, the more it razzles and dazzles and impresses.

There are all kinds of annoying biases like this. For example, it's been shown that a taller man is paid more than a shorter man for doing the same work. (Actually, that one doesn't bother me so much.) Other biases. It's been proven that in a group setting, those who use the most words are perceived to be the leader of the group. It's not about the quality of the words, or leadership skills. It's about quantity, simply piling on the words. Other studies show that loud people are assumed to be better leaders over those who are soft spoken. Attractive people are thought to be smarter than those who are not. Men whose voices are pitched lower are favored over those whose voices are higher. Then, of course there are all those isms that continue to haunt us: racism, sexism, ageism. With all these biases in mind, can you imagine the uphill struggle it would be for a short, unattractive, elderly, woman of color who is soft-spoken and uses few, but simple words? She could be absolutely brilliant, but it's unlikely you would come to know that given all the biases lined up against her.

We like to think the world is just, but often it's not, because we measure people by what they look like and how they sound.

In 1 Samuel, when it was time to find a new king, Samuel thought he had his man. His name was Eliab. All we know is that Eliab was tall and handsome. Samuel presented Eliab before the Lord and said, “Surely this man would make a good king.” But the Lord said, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. Man looks at the outward appearance; the Lord looks at the heart” (v16).

It’s a consistent criticism God has of us. In John 7, Jesus told the crowd, “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment!” (v. 24). In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, “You are looking only on the surface of things” (2 Cor. 10:7). Apparently, Paul’s opponents were not impressed with his appearance. They were saying, quote, “His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive.”

Because we cannot read the heart or mind, we rely on what we see and hear. Therefore, our knowledge is imperfect and our justice flawed. Besides, we’re not as interested in accuracy as we are in efficiency. Racism isn’t at all just, but it is *very* efficient. Clump people together on the basis of race and you can make all kinds of assumptions about them without ever having to get to know them. We think we can size people up in an instant. I’m sure you’ve heard that when interviewing potential employees, the decision is usually made within two or three seconds laying eyes on them. How just and right is that?

Our text from Isaiah points to the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah writes, “He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge.” It’s a text that captures the excitement and reality of both the first coming of Jesus and his return to judge. He’s not going to be like other leaders. In chapter 1, Isaiah calls them “whores” and “rebels” and “companions of thieves.” Each of them [quote] “loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, nor are they concerned about the plight of the widow” (21-23). In Isaiah 5, the Lord condemns those sophisticated ones of society “who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight! Woe to those who acquit the guilty for a bribe!”

In contrast to those unjust leaders, our text says the “The

Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him [the Messiah], the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge.” How refreshing! The judgments of the Messiah will not be distorted by any biases. He owes no allegiance to special interest groups. He cannot be swayed by bribes. He cannot be deceived by lies or misled by appearances.

Think of the most foolish things you’ve ever done. Almost always it’s because you went on the basis of appearances. It looked good. She looked good. They looked good. Everything seemed fine, and you didn’t have the wisdom to see beneath the surface.

Think of the grand entrances professional basketball teams make before the game, and how they are introduced with the houselights down low and the spot light on each player, and the pounding music from the audio system, and the cheerleaders. It’s quite a show. If you’re the Son of God, isn’t something like that how you would want to come down to earth? But in his wisdom, that’s not how God did it. He didn’t appeal to any of our biases. He came quietly, secretly almost, to a backwater village. Even in Bethlehem, most people had no idea what just happened right underneath their noses. Even if someone would have led them to the manger, they would only have noticed only the dank smell of a shed, of animals, of manure, of feed. They would have noticed parents who clearly didn’t have enough money or connections to rent even a simple room. They would have noticed their newborn baby—so frail, so vulnerable, so dependent on his parents for everything. But they certainly would not have thought to themselves, “Here lies the new born King, the very Son of God.”

According to the biases of man, Jesus did it all wrong. But as Paul writes, “The foolishness of God is wiser than man” (1 Cor. 1:25). Nor as an adult did Jesus impress people with his height or muscularity or voice or his rugged good looks. Isaiah 53, “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; he was despised and we esteemed

him not.”

And what of his followers? Did Jesus choose John the Baptist on the basis of his polished interpersonal skills. Did he choose to visit the home of Zacchaeus because he was tall, handsome and popular? Did he teach in parables to astonish us with his knowledge of theological jargon? Does he come to us in Word and water and wine in order to dazzle us into the faith? No! God consistently chooses the low things of the world, the common and the ordinary things of the world, the things easily overlooked.

You can see, then, how dangerous our biases can be. If we let them run the show, if we judge everything by what our eyes see, we risk missing out on the kingdom of God, because it is hidden under the common and ordinary.

When Jesus returns on the last day, he’s coming to be our judge. On that day, no one will miss his coming. Nor will we be able to hide behind any biases that work in our favor today. God will not be impressed by our skin color, our wealth or educational pedigree. He will not be impressed by our height or by the depth or volume of our voices or by the quantity or complexity of our words. We will not be able to dazzle God or otherwise distract him from the reality of our sin. He has absolute knowledge of our sin to make a right judgment, and he could justly condemn us. But the good news is he does have one bias, and that is the predisposition and penchant to have mercy. When he judges you, he will not do so on the basis of how you’ve lived, but on the basis of how his Son Jesus died for you on the cross. Not how we have soiled ourselves with sin, but how he has cleansed us with his blood; not how we went astray, but how he did save us.

In no way is this a perversion of justice. No, the demands of justice were fully met on the cross, where Jesus was “pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities” (Is. 53). His suffering on the cross was no perversion of justice, only its fulfillment.

That righteousness of God and forgiveness of God is given us in Holy Baptism. So, on the Day of Judgment, who is he going to see? He’s not going to see you crumpled under the full

weight of your sin. No, he's going to see Christ. Galatians 3:27, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Hear that again, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ." Clothed in Christ, we need not hide like Adam in Eve did in the garden. No! As the baptismal liturgy says, you can "stand without fear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the inheritance prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (LSB p. 271).

God is fully capable of bringing our secret sins out into the bright light of day and condemning us with them. But he chooses to judge us on the bases of what we're wearing, of all things, and thanks be to God, by grace we are wearing the cloak of Christ's righteousness! Standing before the judgment seat of God, one glance at our clothing will suffice. You've been clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Love has covered over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). That grace of Jesus Christ is sufficient for today, for tomorrow, and for eternity. Thanks be to God. Amen.



