

“I See You”

Matthew 25:34-40

34 “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.

35 For I was hungry, and
you fed me. I was thirsty,
and you gave me a drink.
I was a stranger, and you
invited me into your home.

36 I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'

37 “Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink?’

38 Or a stranger and
show you hospitality?
Or naked and give you
clothing? 39 When did
we ever see you sick or
in prison and visit you?’

40 “And the King will say,
‘I tell you the truth, when
you did it to one of the
least of these my
brothers and sisters,
you were doing it to me!’

What’s going on here?

1. Is this about earning your salvation? I don’t think so, but true faith is more that just claiming to have faith. It’s more that agreeing with a set of beliefs. If we really love God, we’ll want to love and serve others – not to get God’s approval, or earn salvation. Rather, when God’s love touches our hearts we are filled with his compassion for people. We’re feel heartfelt gratitude for God’s grace, and we want to share it with others.
2. Also, love is “more than a feeling.” You may have noticed that Deb is a more compassionate person than me. I’m more like Joe Friday – “just the facts, maam.” (If you’re under 30, I’ll explain that to you later.) I’m more a thinker than a feeler. That’s doesn’t let me off the hook, though. I still have a heart, and God expects us to respond out of obedience regardless of what we feel.
3. Also, what’s going on here? Jesus says when we do all these things, we’re really doing it to him – “**when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!**” How can that be? I want you to think for a moment of a brother or sister or loved one I don’t know. Got that locked in? Now imagine if I saw your sister Janet or your brother Ed – I saw them struggling to make ends meet, to put food on the table, and I said to myself – too bad, I sure hope they somehow make it. Imagine if I saw Janet or Ed with their car broke down, they can’t get it started and need a jump or some kind of assistance. I say to myself – I hope they have AAA. I’m sure there about to call someone on the cell phone. Or they get arrested and taken to jail, and then moved from jail to jail, no idea of when they’d get out (sound familiar), and I just said – too bad, I hope they get that straightened out, and then go on my way. Then imagine I met you later, and somehow mentioned your brother or sister to you. You’d said, “That’s Ed – that’s my brother. That’s Janet – that’s my sister.” I’d say, “O my, I can’t believe it, are you serious! If I’d have he was your brother, I’d have done something. That’s precisely what Jesus says to us about such persons. “Hey, that’s my brother. Hey that’s my sister!” If only you had done something.
4. Ever notice how many more cars you see for sale when you’re looking for a car? We needed our car AC fixed last summer and it was HOT. My radar was out for ways to get that fixed. I spotted a sign on the garage of a house next to Rudy’s in Moline. Funny how you can find things when you’re looking for them. The point: **YOU SEE THE THINGS YOU’RE LOOKING FOR.**

“I see you.”



It's a way to say that you really see the other person – not in a superficial way – but in an actual way – You see the other person. Not the cashier at the quick stop, or the customer service rep at Firestone. Not just another person in your neighborhood. Not, “O that's just my crazy family.” You see deeper. You see the person.

1. The Problem

- living robotically.



We've got stuff to do – we're moving from one thing to the next.

We're immersed in our own inner world

Now we've got cell phones, smart phones, phone calls and texts going on all the time all around us.

Ever notice how many people are on the phone as you're driving around

Every notice how many people are texting – not just young people.

We're so immersed in our own inner world we don't see the people around us.

“We are a multi-cultural family seeking *to grow in love of God and neighbor*, intent on sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.”

At our Vision Planning Retreat at Benet Retreat we worked on a revised mission statement.

The Advisory Council recently considered this statement.

How do we grow in love of God and neighbor?

If we can't really “see” each other, how can we connect?

2. The Foundation

– If we want to grow in love, we must first connect.

3. The Question

- How can we
really connect?

A byline we've begun to emphasize at our church is "Let's Connect!"

We live in a world inundated with communication, yet we struggle to really connect.

Many have become disillusioned with the institutional form of church.



Debbie and I hear this often: “I believe in God, I’m just not so sure about the church.” “I believe you can have a personal relationship with God outside the church.” People have not stopped being interested in spiritual things. Everyone has spiritual needs. They say, “I believe in God, I’m just not so sure about the church.” “I’m not so sure I need the church to believe in God.

Well I believe that, too – to a degree.

You can know God, pray to him, seek to be open to him on your own.

But the early church didn’t know of any faith in Jesus that was strictly solitary and individual.

It is through **CONNECTING** with one another that we know God better, love him, and experience him more – first within the church and then outside it.

4. The Pathway

- open our eyes
and actually see.

Before we can grow in love of neighbor, we must first be aware of them – WE MUST SEE THEM. Come out of our own self-focused world and SEE others. As Jesus says in Matthew 25, it's often a matter of **being aware** of the people around us, often hurting.

Our co-worker or classmate whose home seems in turmoil.

Our friend or neighbor whose buckling under the financial pressure of these tough times.

That teen who is isolated and thinks no one really cares. They cave into addictions they are hurting so bad.

The kid who stands by herself on the playground.

They're all around us.

We are especially
called to see ones
on the fringes – on
the margins – ones
who are almost
invisible.

It used to hurt me so much to hear my sister Sara talk about their daughter Kristen.

Kristen was different. They kept her in the public school, though it was a struggle and she was able to graduate.

But more and more she **couldn't connect with reality** like most people. The **chemical balance** in the brain we can take for granted wasn't there.

She **didn't know the normal social cues** that are involved in social interaction.

Going to school could be excruciating. She **didn't have friends**. She was **isolated**. It was so **sad**. It broke my heart.

If it bothered me so much, I can't imagine what it was like for Sara and Ken to live through.

Yet we are surrounded by people who live in different worlds of "private pain". They live fear to fear.

When I was a teen, I had the usual needs and struggles to be accepted, to find my niche, my group.

School can be a place where everyone is looking to fit in – to be cool.

It's odd – everyone is walking around **looking at each other sideways**, comparing themselves to each other. You feel terrible if you don't fit in or don't measure up.

I struggled with this like everyone else, yet as I grew up, **I began to see another way out.**

Look for those who needed a friend and talk to them.

You're at a party and you're looking for where to connect. Look for someone who needs a friend and connect with them

My freshman year, I filled my desk pad with the names of people I'd met. Remembering their name made an impression and made a difference.

Yet I would also walk into Russell cafeteria sometimes and **look for someone sitting alone**. Just sit down and eat with them. There was something very freeing about that.

Do we really see the people around us? Do we see them as people. We say we want to love our neighbor. Do we really see them?



Richard Jones “The Jewel”

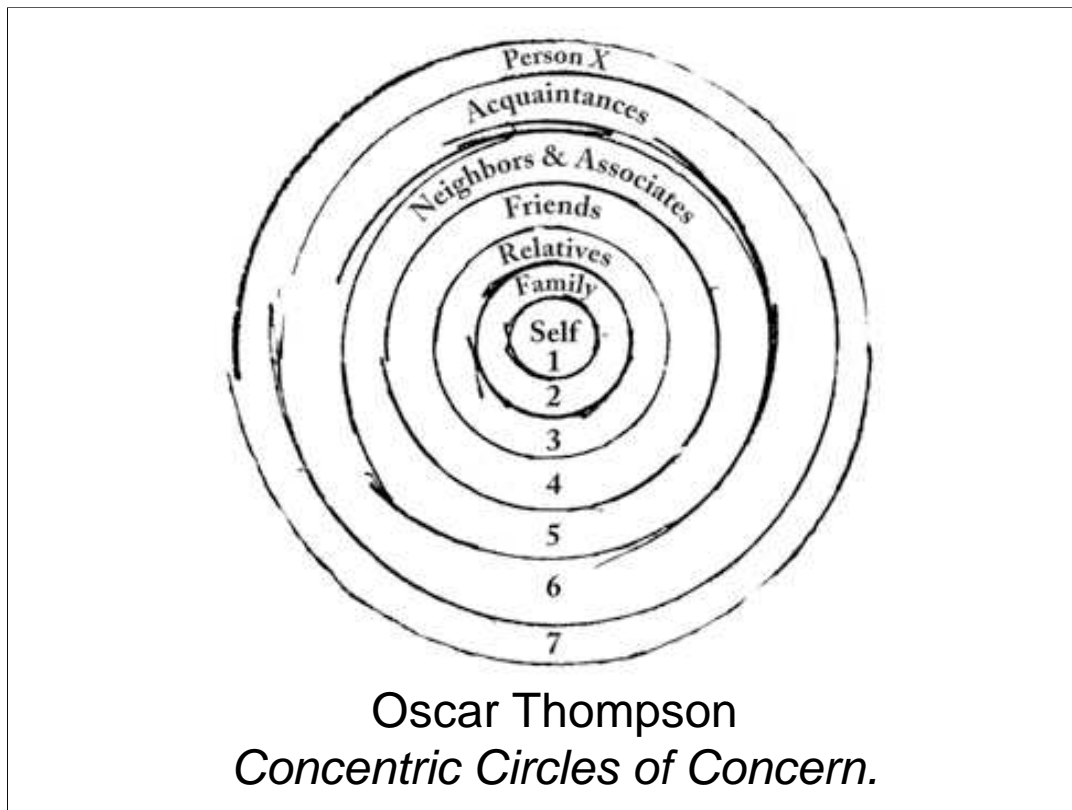
The Jewel
By Richard Jones

I like this moment when there's nothing more I need to do.
 When I have emptied everything on the counter –
 Eggs, bread, and some chocolate I'll give my children after homework
 And I'm free to study the checkout lady's red face
 Ever so slightly gasping for air
 The quick hands of the teen age boy distractedly bagging groceries
 And the lady behind me so tiny she stands on tippy toes to empty her cart.
 I have all the time in the world to open my wallet
 And count bills for the Salvation Army Bellringer
 Standing outside the automatic glass door in the dark and falling snow.
 Time even to survey the sad faces on the magazines and read the headlines
 And confessions and forgive each star by name.

But when everything has been counted and bagged,
 The bill calculated and the receipt handed to me,
 I've forgotten where I am and what I'm doing
 So determined am I to see the angels William Blake tells me stand among us,
 Cherubim lingering by the illuminated bins of produce,
 Seraphim protecting the fish sticks in the frozen food section.
 The cashier saying, “Sir, sir” but
 Now I am seeking to pierce the veil that separates us from the saints in heaven.

Gazing out over the rows of shoppers waiting in line with their carts,
 And now holding up everyone in line behind me I am squinting to find
 My father who loved fish sticks.
 To see him in his appointed place among the multitudes of angels and saints
 The heavenly choir I can almost hear singing to me.

[DO WE REALLY SEE THE PEOPLE AROUND US?]



DO WE SEE THE PEOPLE IN OUR CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF CONCERN? (Oscar Thompson)

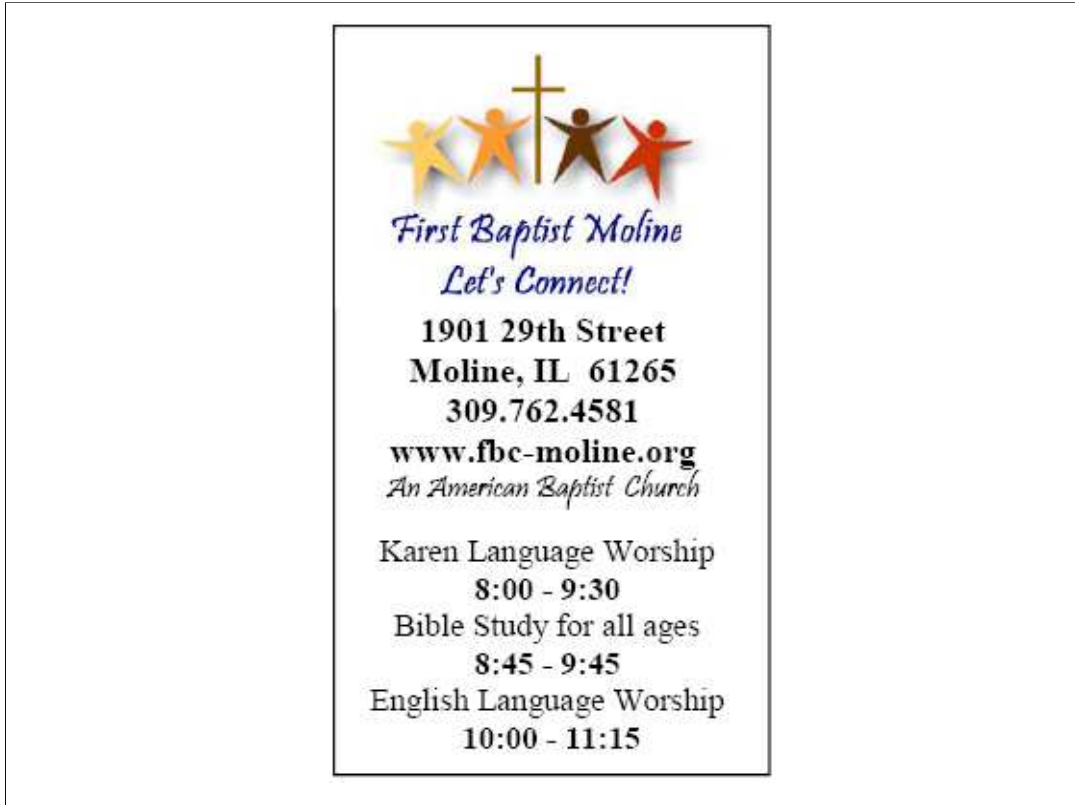
“The gospel moves on contiguous lines—on lines of relationship.” I explained the circles and what each circle represented:

- Circle 1 is self.
- Circle 2 is immediate family.
- Circle 3 is relatives.
- Circle 4 is close friends.
- Circle 5 is neighbors and associates.
- Circle 6 is acquaintances.
- Circle 7 is Person X.

I explained that God holds us responsible for everyone He brings into our sphere of influence. Many of us would rather focus on circle 7 to salve our consciences, because we don’t want to deal with ruptured relationships in circles 2–6.

When we have ruptured relationships horizontally with people, we also have a ruptured relationship vertically with God. Although we know the Lord, we are not willing to let Him be Lord of everything and accept, love, and forgive people on His conditions.

With Person X, on the other hand, our lifestyles do not have to be consistent. We can talk to Person X and then be on our way. There is nothing wrong with telling Person X about Jesus. We are supposed to do that. God brings these people into our lives. However, if we do not tell people in circles 2–6 about the Lord, we are hypocritical. If our relationship with the Lord is authentic, we want to share the good news of Christ with those closest to us as much as we do with strangers.



I was inspired by the Finance Committee. We were talking about pledges. They said there's a more important pledge than a financial pledge. It's a pledge to reach out to the people around us. To see them. To reach out to them in some way.

Would you pledge to tell 10 people about your church. **To say, "Hey, you should check out our church. It's a great place to connect. Here – come check it out."**

Let them know about our church. Maybe give them one of these cards.

Who do you
see in your
circles of
concern?