I’m going to put someone’s picture on the screen. You’ll probably recognize who it is. When you see it, please notice how you react inside.

Ready?

*Show a picture of Toronto’s Mayor, Rob Ford.*

I’ve never liked Mr. Ford very much. The day he admitted to his drug use, I was grabbing a coffee and made some snide joke about it. A woman was sitting there, and she called me on it. She is a drug and alcohol counsellor. While no Ford fan, she nonetheless had insight into what he is going through, and why he is acting as he is. She was right, and I was wrong. She was seeing Rob differently than I was.

I don’t live anywhere near Rob, but he is still my neighbour. How do you love your neighbour, when they are not so lovely? Or worse?

We’ve been thinking about neighbours. Jesus said two things make the capstone that holds together God’s Way of life. Love God with everything about yourself. Love your neighbour as if they were you.

But your neighbour is not you.

Jesus told a story about this; we read it a couple weeks ago. In that story, he said some very troubling, deeply disturbing things. Jesus took the word “neighbour” and put it with the word “Samaritan.” We’ve looked at who the Samaritans were. Just put there whomever you think is below you, offensive to you, troubling to you, a threat to you, an enemy to you. That’s your Samaritan. Now, put the word “neighbour” beside them. That’s what Jesus does.

To see them as our neighbour, we’ve really got to change how we see them.

We all see, right? With our eyes, but I’m talking about seeing with our hearts.

When we see our neighbour wrongly, we cannot love them rightly.

Our upbringing, family, friends, community, what we read and watch, church, and our experiences . . . all are shaping our heart-sight. We see someone always through filters that slant what we see. We can’t escape this. We are always filtering, taking in some

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1 Mayor Ford was in the midst of a scandal about his public drunkenness, cocaine use, and lying. It was receiving international media attention and dominating the news.
information and keeping some out. We are always putting people into categories: us-them, safe-dangerous. We don’t see ourselves doing this. We just do it.²

Without these reading glasses, I don’t see up close very well. Blurry letters remind me I need eye-sight correction. Our heart-sight is blurry too. Yet we get so used to it, we don’t notice we need heart-sight correction.

We don’t see that we are not seeing others well.

Mark Labberton has written a great book, called The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbour. Here’s what he says happens when our sight of someone is slanted.

> People made in the image of God – intended to bring honor to the God of the universe, to give and receive love from others who bear that image, to have the capacity to think, dream, imagine, sing, hope – are not rightly valued. . . . human life itself is jeopardized, if not extinguished, by our mis-seeing. . . .³

When we see our neighbour wrongly, we cannot love them rightly.

III

So how can we see them rightly?

Can we see with the eyes of God?

God sent the prophet Samuel to pick a new king for Israel. God cautioned him about how he’d see. God said:

> “The LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”⁴

We are not God. We can only see through our own heart-sight, our own filters. Our sight is profoundly limited.⁵

So how can I see my neighbour rightly? I can hear how God sees them. To love them, understand them, bless them, I need to see how God sees them.

² Mark Labberton writes, “Spoken or unspoken, our sight filters instantly allow some information in and keep some out, categorizing, framing, typing. . . . We don’t see ourselves perceiving. We just see. This means we can be blind about our seeing.” The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbour: Seeing Others Through the Eyes of Jesus (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2010), 75.
³ Ibid, 65.
⁴ 1st Samuel 16.7.
⁵ “. . . beyond the typical range of limitations is the fact that we cannot see or know someone else heart. That is a fundamental and profound limitation in our sight. . . . What might be the most important thing we would want to know about someone else, we cannot actually see. Just as important, neither can they.” Labberton, 75.
That scripture we read together, Psalm 139, gives us some important clues.  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{God has explored their heart, and knows exactly who they are.} \\
\text{Even the small details, like when they sit and stand.} \\
\text{Before they speak, God knows what they’ll say.} \\
\text{God has got them covered. In front, and behind, God’s hand is on them.} \\
\text{They are fearfully and wonderfully made.} \\
\end{align*}
\]
(And so on. . . .)

IV

Let me show you a trailer for a documentary. It’s about some Palestinians and Israelis. Enemies. What they have in common is they are all bereaved. They’ve lost people dear to them in the conflict. Their common pain brings them together.⁶

[Please watch the clip: \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzJkBxQC4Tg}]

They were honest with each other. They said hard things to each other. Seeing with the heart of God does not mean sugar-coating, or smoothing things over.

They listened. We only understand by listening. Listening is hard! Listening changes how we see.

They learned to see each other differently.

V

Loving our neighbour means seeing our neighbour. Maybe for the first time, really seeing them.

Think of a person who Jesus says is your neighbour, and you wish he did not. It makes you uncomfortable to think of them that way.

I need to learn to see Rob Ford as my neighbour. That doesn’t mean excusing his behaviour, at all. Nor the consequences of his behaviour. There is a lot I don’t like about him.

I need to hear how God sees him. What does Psalm 139 say about Rob? What does it say about your troublesome neighbour?

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{O Lord, You know Rob.} \\
\text{You know every bit about him:} \\
\phantom{.} \text{what he’s thinking,} \\
\phantom{.} \text{when he is waking or sleeping,} \\
\phantom{.} \text{and everything he does.} \\
\text{You know what he is going to say before he does.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

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⁶ The documentary is called \textit{Two Sided Story}, and is produced by the Parents Circle Families Forum (\url{www.theparentscircle.org}).
You are in front of him and behind him, all around him, and Your hand is on him.

Can he go anywhere apart from Your Spirit? Is there anywhere he can go to escape Your watchful presence? . . . Even if he is afraid and thinks to himself, “The darkness will swallow me, and the light become night!” – the darkness is not dark to You, but as bright as day.

You shaped him. You knit him together in his mom’s womb.

I praise you. For Rob is fearfully and wonderfully made.

Such are the eyes of God, for your neighbour.

Now, can you love them?