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Larry DeLong

Show Me – John 14:1-14

A couple of weeks ago, Pastor Diane told us that at every meeting she went to, for a whole week, she asked those present if they had any scars – and immediately the sleeves went up, the knees were displayed... which reminded me of the famous picture of Lyndon Johnson showing off his gall bladder scar to the astonished press corps.

Not only do we take a certain sort of strange pride in showing off our scars, we expect to see them. Some scars, like belly-buttons, everybody has; and after a while, life leaves lots of them on us, though most of them not visible – and with the addition of a few wrinkles, they can hide even better.

But what about the ones inside? We all know they're present, if we're at all aware of the toll life takes; do we take account of them? Even if they show in someone's every behavior?

My grandfather on my mother's side lost the love of his life when he was 86. It was fully five years before he was his old self (pun intended), five full years to process the grief; my own father took nearly thirty years to finally exorcize the ghost and guilt of the loss of my older

brother, Doug, who died before I was born. There are important things we cannot see.

Yet we do indeed trust that things we can't see are there. We know for certain that there's air, for example; we trust our memories of those we have known, especially loved ones.

But just as some scars are invisible, so are many of our best features. Some of the most difficult people I've met have had soft spots of beauty, hidden deep – often, very intentionally – from the world. And even those visible parts: many a handsome man or beautiful woman sees an ordinary person at best in the mirror, and we've been taught not to be too showy. So, we don't always bring out or make use of our best features – and not just people. And imagine what this world was like a few thousand – or million – years ago! It's not always obvious. You have to look carefully, dig deep.

That hiddenness, that need to dig deep to find the beauty or the scar is true, too, of the things of God. And so much of what the church does seems ordinary, matter-of-fact, routine.

I've told Thomas Merton's story before about the new convert who expected the wafer he received at his first communion to be burning, chili-pepper hot, since it was holy, the very body of Christ, as he believed. Anne Lamott has written that we should approach worship scared more than half-way to death by the awesome, terrifying power we

are sitting here so calmly in the presence of, praying to so glibly, singing praises to so calmly. Sitting here, in this beautiful place – which too often we’ve become so comfortable with, so peaceful in, that we may even be complacent, we may well lose our awareness of what we’re really doing.

We really don’t know what we’re dealing with, when we invoke God, any more than we realize the power in a propane tank, the amount of electricity running through our homes, the potential disaster of the energies we take for granted. How many have hurtled down I-19 at seventy-five miles an hour in a vehicle weighing several tons just inches from the car ahead? We don’t notice these things – at least until our attention becomes focused on them.

And there’s something about these invisible things of God, these invisible scars of Jesus and beauty of ancient creation that still exist to this very day: they are right in front of us. We simply don’t see them, we don’t notice. Oh, our eyes take them in; our ears hear the winds of the Spirit blowing around us – but we are blind to them, deaf to their message, probably because we have seen or heard them so long, so often, every day of our lives, that we just don’t see them for what they are any more than we see the bomb on our backyard barbeque.

There’s an old trick of military tacticians called “hiding in plain sight.” You parents know this one, too: the kids have all figured out the

places you usually hide stuff, so you just put whatever it is right out in the open. And because their wonderful, God-given, sin-broken minds can't believe that someone would do that, it works. Happened at our house just Friday night: we're doing some work in our bedroom, and I moved Valerie's laundry basket to a chair, right in the middle of the room. She looked and looked and finally called me in – and there it was!

There are ways that this sort of thing works for us that you can prove for yourself, if you like. There's a place in the back of the eye where the optic nerve exits the back of your eyeball, and there are no light receptors there. That means that there's a tiny spot where you can't see – but you may well have never have noticed it, because your mind fills in that spot with what *should* be there.

Unfortunately for us, our human minds have a very strong tendency to do the opposite with the things of God: they tell us that such things *can't* be there.

All this is a long way of telling you about poor Phillip's problem. He didn't mean to ask a dumb question; he just wanted to see God, even though he'd been walking alongside God in Jesus for years.

So. The very simple challenge I have for you today is to spend some time consciously looking *for* God, instead of looking past him. The God, our God, who is hidden in our plain sight. In case that sounds too

hard or too complicated, let me give you a very direct hint: God, in the Holy Spirit, is present in every person you will meet today. Take a look to your right and left: there's the very image of God. Scripture tells us that. Pretty simple, wasn't it? So then, ask yourself, where else am I missing God as I go busily about my day? Remember, our God isn't just hanging out in some heavenly lounge chair, watching us run around like a hill of ants: God knows each of us, by name, knows the hairs on our head – if there're are any left.

The hard part, the really hard part, is describing what you'll see. And why it looks like God to you. The poet William Blake put it well: "To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour." (from *Auguries of Innocence*) *There is a gift – a gift of the Spirit.*

So Jesus comforts his disciples, who finally begin to understand that they're part of something so much bigger than themselves. And we use these words – portions of Jesus' talk with them – in nearly every memorial service, because they truly are words of comfort.

But don't be fooled – they also remind us that we, too, are part of something that is so much bigger than any one of us, or all of us together: the Kingdom of God – and at the same time, that we are such an important part of it God will stop at nothing to bring us safely into the Kingdom.

Let not your hearts be troubled; neither let them be afraid. Jesus, scars and all, has gone ahead of us, and prepared our place. But while our rooms are getting ready, we've still got lots to do here and now! So keep your eyes and ears and hearts open – God is among us, with us, around us every moment.