**The Big Picture**

Based on [John 6:35-51](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn6.35-51)

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Pentecost 11

By Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

Todays sermon is based on the Gospel lesson from John, Chapter 6, especially this verse. “**For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”**

It’s been a long day at home with the kids and dad needs a nap. Two kids go down for a nap, but his 6 year old son just isn’t tired. So dad has a dandy idea. He picks up a magazine he’d been reading that has on one page a map of the world. He tears up the map of the world into irregularly shaped pieces and thinks, “**This will keep my son busy for at least an hour.**” 10 minutes later, the puzzle is done and the son wakes his dad who wonders how he did it so fast. His son says, “**Well dad, on the other side their was a picture of a man, and when I put him together, I found the world was put together too.”**

I heard a sermon not too long ago that began with this story. The minister, she had me listening, and I was ready to steal that story for my own sermon someday. Because I thought for sure, the picture of the man was going to be Jesus. I was wrong. Turns out the map of the world was, of course, the world…and picture of the man is your-“self.” And so you know what the lesson was: “**If you put yourself together, then the world falls into place for you**.” And Jesus had no role to play in this “Gospel”, that says “**put yourself together, figure yourself out and then everything else will come together for you.”**

And isn’t that a sermon with a message you can take home, and live out? We spend our whole lives thinking about ourselves anyway…if a sermon tells you to do just that, of course it will be a very practical sermon…as practical as telling someone to breath, and just about as useless.

A preacher is supposed to speak for God, and so this minister committed a great sin. She made these people think that the Gospel that God has to tell the world is that everybody should be their own project, to put the puzzle of their own life together so they can look at the finished project.

For the record, nowhere in the bible does God give us that message, that our problems in this life are because we don’t know ourselves well enough. Instead, today’s gospel message says that we don’t know our savior well enough. Jesus says, “**Everyone who looks upon the Son and believes should have eternal life.**” It’s the God’s honest truth that when we put together the picture of a man and look upon it, the world will come together for us, but that picture is not of ourselves. We don’t look in the mirror to see the promised land..we look at Jesus, and Jesus only.

I don’t think the minister realized what she was preaching a Gospel of self-centeredness. Telling sinners to solve his problems by focussing more on themselves is like like telling an alcoholic to solve his problems with a drink. But that’s the new modern religion that she was preaching. Not some old-stuffy religion from an old stuffy book, but the religion of “self.” The point of her sermon was that if you take the time to, figure yourself out, listen to your own heart and ignore what other people think, be your own project and “put yourself together,” the image you’ll see in the mirror is God. What do we call someone whose biggest project is himself, who primps and preens in the mirror, whose favorite activity is looking at their own picture as if it were the center of the world map? We’d call them self-centered, narcissistic, we’d call them vain.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the bible does talk about people who focus on themselves. It tells a story about the first people who thought that the way to happiness and salvation was to put themselves together and look at their own picture. You know who the first people who looked at themselves were…Adam and Eve.

When they were first created, Adam and Eve lived in paradise with God and were happy. They never bothered taking the time to “figure themselves out” because they knew who they were. God told them who they were, and that was that. And that was all they needed until…until sin slithered into their lives.

Before sin, they streaked around the streams of Eden without a care in the world. Lettin’ it all hang out free and easy and happy like children playing in the bathtub. It’s after sin entered into the world that they became self-conscious. Looked down and said, “**holy smokes, we’re naked…we don’t like the way we look, how embarrassing, let’s cover up**.” And God asked, “**Who told you you were naked**.” In other words, they didn’t get this information from God, it was their own self-evaluation, turning their eyes inward and away from God that made them “self-aware.” Sin is focusing on yourself, and only when you’re eyes are focused on yourself do you realize you’re naked. “Knowing yourself” is not a blessing of God, it is the first curse of sin.

The curse of sin is that we become self-centered, self-indulgent, self-worshipping. We wish to interpret and fashion the world around us in our own image our own picture. That’s why the cure to the disease of sin is so fitting. God gives us another picture to look at…he gives us the picture of Jesus. *In our Gospel lesson* Jesus says what his Father’s plan is. It’s that **everyone who looks upon the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.** Eternal life doesn’t come from believing in yourself, it comes from believing in the Son of God.

Ladies and Gentlemen, know this eternal life is not just believing. You can believe in yourself and yet be far from the kingdom of God; you can believe in the human spirit; you can believe in truth, justice and the Canadian way, you can believe in alien life on other planets, you can just “believe” but believing doesn’t save you; It’s looking upon Jesus and believing that saves.

So, special friends, if looking at Jesus and believing is what saves…you need to make sure you have the right picture of him. You can find books today that say Jesus had a wife and kids. You can find books today that say Jesus came to North America after his death and preached there. You can find people who claim that Jesus never even existed.

There are plenty of different teachings about Jesus out there, why? Because we want to make Jesus into our own image. And so we try to Photoshop Jesus. And it’s not that we want to make his teeth whiter or his smile brighter. It’s not that we try to remove his wrinkles, and airbrush his face. Heck, we don’t even know what Jesus looked like in the visible sense…(probably wasn’t a redhead though.) No, people try to make Jesus look more like themselves.

Elton John once told Parade magazine that “**I think Jesus was a compassionate, super-intelligent gay man who understood human problems**” Now to say that Jesus is compassionate, that’s from the bible. To say that he’s super-intelligent, well read the stories about how he outwits the Pharisees…pure genius. To say that he’s gay!?? Where did that come from? Well it came from Elton John photoshopping Jesus into himself. Making Jesus into Elton Jesus.

Now listen closely…it’s no doubt easier for Elton John to believe in an Elton Jesus, It’s easier for Pastor Nathan to believe in a “Nathan Jesus”, but here’s the thing: anyone who looks at a picture of *himself* and believes is no closer to eternal life, even if they caption it “Jesus.”

So then, how do you know what Jesus looks like? How do you get the whole picture of Jesus? By knowing the whole bible. Not every word and every verse on every page, but knowing that when you take all the stories and the teachings and the commandments and the principles of the bible and put them together, you have a clear and accurate picture of Jesus.

And he’s not a Jesus that looks like you or me. He’s not an Elton Jesus, or an Oprah Jesus, or a Dr. Phil Jesus. He is Christ Jesus, the one that the Prophets wrote about, the one that the apostles saw with their own eyes and believed with their own hearts and confessed with their own lips. It is the picture of Jesus that you put together everytime you confess the apostle’s creed. When you confess “bible Jesus”, you have the big picture that puts together not just the world, but heaven and earth.