

Since, despite my late summer prediction of an eight win season, my Illinois football team for some reason was not playing in a bowl game this holiday season, and because I wanted to be supportive of a local effort in Tucson to have a bowl game there, accompanied by a friend and his college baseball-playing son, I attended the first “Arizona Bowl” in Tucson this past Tuesday, hauling along my trusty binoculars so that I could bring up close to me details of play that are not so readily picked up by the naked eye.

I have been using binoculars at football games since receiving a pair of them as a Christmas gift way back when I was a college freshman, when my distance vision was something like 20/10. Something changed in my visual acuity over time: beginning maybe ten years ago, when I put down my binoculars to check a player’s number in the program, I sometimes have to put on my glasses in order to read the small print! I had incurred what I am sure a few of you have experienced: *presbyopia*, sometimes called “farsightedness,” where one can see better at a distance than up close; *presbyopia* tends to be age related — the name comes from the same Greek root as *Presbyterian*: *presbos* means “elder.”

My case is not bad; in good light I can manage reasonably well, but I almost always need my glasses for close work and reading, especially footnotes. Without the contact lens in my right eye that I wear both out of vanity and because the wire microphone I wear at Florence hooks over my left ear and competes for space with the frame of my glasses when I wear them, without that contact lens the reading I do during the service might prove a challenge, even with my sixteen point font.

No, despite the emergence of astigmatism now in my left eye, *presbyopia* means that I am better seeing what is further away than what is right before me, staring me in the face.

And is not that same inability to see what is right before us a human issue, and something that is particularly perplexing when we as Christians are guilty of it? In

particular, our inability to see what Simeon saw in our reading from Luke? Our inability to see Jesus appearing before us, staring us in the face?

And allow me to avoid explaining what I mean by that for just a moment. Today is, of course, *Epiphany*, well, not exactly, Epiphany is this coming Wednesday, the tradition being the twelfth day after Christmas, the day we say is described in the Matthew passage of the three Magi, yet which we tend to conflate with Luke's story of Jesus' birth and the shepherds, the angels, and the manger. The reason for this "name" is that the correct theological definition of an *epiphany* is not a "Eureka, I get it!" moment, but rather, *epiphany* refers to God's revelation of God's self — God's action, not our realization of it.

Which is well and good, but without the Magi's recognition we would not have the writer of Matthew's story. The writer of Luke's story about Simeon and Anna — which occurs four days earlier, if the convention that Epiphany was twelve days after Jesus' birth is accepted — the story about Simeon and Anna also fits the bill of being an *epiphany*, for, the writer tells us:

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,

according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles

and for glory to your people Israel."

And my point today is a simple one — or two. While we do not know Simeon's age, Anna was eighty-four, younger than some of us but older than some of us as

well, reminding us that being of an age where we might have visual *presbyopia* does not mean we should be incapable of recognizing God's self-revelation, of recognizing Jesus; age is not an excuse for . . . and again bear with me just a moment, and we'll see for what it is not an adequate excuse.

The second point relates to that first. The example I use to the point of exhaustion is that we never know when we might be the way in which the woman with the screaming kids in front of us in the checkout lane at Target — I do not want to be considered a shrill for Wal-mart, the name I usually use — we never know when we might be the way in which that woman encounters Jesus that day.

But I also add — and the two really go together — we never know when *she* might be the way we encounter Jesus; *she* might be God's *Epiphany* for us, for just as we carry Jesus inside of us, Jesus is inside of others, as well, and we must not let any residual impatience and grouchiness inside of us — such as I too often carry when I am hurriedly trying to get through a check-out line — we must not let being old and grouchy blind us to seeing him in the other. Being in a hurry is not an adequate excuse.

Epiphany. As I mentioned when it happened, one of my few heroes died this past year, Minnie Minoso, but I have not lately referred to the man who became one of my few heroes, though I had not heard of him until nearly twenty years after his death, the German pastor and theologian — and martyr — Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer wrote that whenever two Christians are together, their relationship is through the presence of a third party — Jesus himself, that the relationship is “the Christ in me relating to the Christ in you” — in “the other,” and that we need to recognize that Christ is indeed in that other person.

And so let us not be *presbyopic* in failing to see what so definitely is before us, for in everyone we encounter, *I* believe Christ is present, even if waiting to be acknowledged by the person he is inhabiting.

Let me add a postscript, with the indulgence of our Canadian friends. In the US, we are embarked on an election year, a *Presidential* election year, that at the moment reveals at least a three-way split among those tuned in politically, and I suspect that three-way political split exists among the members of this church family. Let us not have a perverse *presbyopia* when we turn to politics. To the best of my knowledge, Jesus is as present in backers of Hilary as in backers of the Donald or in backers of Chris Christie — time does not permit my naming every candidate. Let us not be blind, whether by *presbyopia* or un-warranted bias based on our political disagreements, blind to seeing Jesus' presence in those with whom we disagree as well as in those with whom we agree.

. . . and in illegal immigrants and, yes, even in people of those faiths that do not recognize him as God, for it is not we humans who determine whether Jesus dwells in people. We Christians are simply fortunate because we recognize that he is within us.

And let me add another comment. Remember those letters, “WWJD” — “What would Jesus do?” Remember them when seeing the other, *seeing Christ in the other*, how Jesus the Jew dealt with Gentiles and described the Samaritan, and when encountering Jesus in the other person, think these not-as-easy-to-remember letters: “WIIJ” — Would I ignore Jesus?

For it does no good to see Jesus if we just ignore him.

So let me not need binoculars to see the Christ in those with whom I might disagree, and let not just me, but all of us open our eyes to see him in the “other” person; if Anna was not too old, her *presbyopia* not debilitating, than neither should ours be — to see Christ, and join in his work.

In his name. Amen.