

“Mirror, mirror on the wall...who’s the fairest of them all?” (SLIDE) How many of you were able to get ready for church this morning without looking in a mirror? Anyone? Maybe one of kids? We check our hair. We make sure our clothing is right. We even turn around for a quick glance at our backsides. We check the mirror throughout the day, too, and sometimes the mirror answers with stuff like, “Oooh! Looking good! You cleaned up nice today.” “Great haircut.” “Beautiful smile!” Then, there are times the mirror answers with, “You have a piece of spinach leftover from lunch stuck between your teeth.” “Those pants kind of pack on the pounds.” “You have wrinkles on your forehead. Were they there yesterday?” We look in the mirror, hoping for perfection, and it sometimes answers with sincerity we wish wasn’t true, and we make a note of what we hope we can improve. Then we get on with our day, and forget what we are like until the *next* time we catch a glimpse of ourselves. **Mirror, Mirror.**

When I was in high school I was in a production of Snow White, and I played the role of the evil stepmother queen. Remember her? (SLIDE) The one obsessed with her magical mirror that always answered, “You are my queen,” when she asked, “Mirror, Mirror on the wall...who’s the fairest of them all?” Then one day, the mirror’s reply to the queen’s question was, “Snow White is the fairest of them all.” As many of you know, that answer caused a lot of trouble for Snow White and her friends. **Mirror, Mirror.**

Our scripture today bring us a little closer to the mirror (SLIDE). The readings from both Mark and James challenge and bring us an urgent message of action. It’s a “come to Jesus” moment, an honest heart-to-heart about who we are. Now we read from the book of Mark regularly, but the book of James? Not so much, and it’s rare we hear a sermon on it. This book of the Bible is dense with wisdom on how to live the Christian faith but Martin Luther didn’t like it. In fact he called it an “epistle of straw” because parts of it resemble “works righteousness”—that in order to be justified by God, in order to be made right with God, we need to *do* works, do something, to be saved. It clashes with the foundation of our Lutheran faith that we are saved by

grace through faith *alone*. Holding onto this confession, I say we throw caution to the wind, and explore this wisdom a little closer while we take a look in the mirror.

(Hold the mirror) So, how do you look? More importantly, how do *we* look? The reading from James begins with “every generous act of giving comes from above.” Every perfect gift. Not some gifts, not only those done by Christians, or acts done by those of friends, but *all* generous acts of giving come from God. All that is good comes from God. Think about that for a moment. Does the reflection you saw just a moment ago look like perfection? Probably not, but how would it change your outlook on life if all you saw and did you recognized as coming from God? How would that change the way you live at home, at work, at school, in our neighborhoods, and in our world? Imagine! Whatever you see in your own reflection and in the world’s, hear the promise that in the good and even the not-so-good, God is present, and is at work in all of it bringing hope and new life because God loves us, the beautiful and the not so beautiful, so very much. **Mirror, Mirror.**

James goes on to talk about being (SLIDE) “hearers of the word.” We are great hearers Christ the King. We have plenty of opportunities to listen about God’s forgiveness and grace. It’s certainly in all of our worship services. You are listening, right? And I know hearing this truth is included in every ministry have: bible studies, Sunday School, Confirmation, circles, small groups, and more. But we need to be careful not to deceive ourselves because *just* hearing is not enough.

Think about Paulie Pastrami. His sister was convinced of the sincerity of his apology when he (SLIDE) made her doll, a greater gesture than just words. We hear that we should care for the orphans and widows, but what we *hear* calls us to action. It is (SLIDE) putting feet to our faith. We can’t just tell the hungry we care, we are to feed them. If we are hearers *without* doing, we have a kind of “faith Alzheimer’s,” a kind of deep forgetfulness that leaves us unable to function fully as God intends. Faith is not only a noun, but a verb (SLIDE) that calls us to *do something* and points us beyond ourselves. To have faith is to *live* faith. It’s not an obligation but a gift and is something for us to hold onto. It doesn’t mean having all the answers, but it’s a willingness to trust and believe in the promises of Christ and leaning into it and living it. When we *do* instead of *just* hear, we

can look in the mirror and reflect God's divine goodness into this brilliant, broken, beautiful world. **Mirror, Mirror.**

We are great doers, too, at Christ the King. We really try to walk our talk. (SLIDE) We are involved with many global and local ministries from Appalachia to Tanzania, from Habitat for Humanity and Daily Work to Pueblo de Fe. This summer we hosted free Vacation Bible School, SUNNY Lunches and Loaves and Fishes, organized and donated school supplies, and hosted an amazing block party that had our community eating, dancing, and playing together. So we are hearers and doers, and that is commendable, but, if we are honest, none of us, as individuals or as a congregation, can look into the mirror and say the reflection is flawless.

(SLIDE) **Mirror, Mirror.**

Like the first century community James was speaking to, we let divisions separate us, we hold onto grudges and fear, we're selfish, and sometimes things get ugly. We can be mean. We are unkind. We run off at the mouth, and our emotions run high. We say we love all people and we don't. Notice how I'm saying, "we," not "you." We all do it, even in church! As Jesus proclaimed to the Pharisees, "it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come, and they defile a person," they corrupt, and separate us from one another. We judge others sitting in the pews with us, at the checkout line, on the first day of school, on the news, and if you're like me, at the (SLIDE) State Fair.

Have any of you been to the fair yet? I love the fair, but in a few short hours with my family, I hated people budging at the Park-and-Ride, children waving ninja swords too close to my eyes, and able-bodied people unwilling to offer their seats to standing seniors citizens. And that was before I even got to the fair! Once there we didn't think twice about spending \$8 on a tray of cheese curds that we didn't need, but yesterday when Derek and I were on a walk, we kept our eyes to the ground and offered a quick "morning" to a man who had just jumped the train, looked lost, was dirty, and could've used a few dollars. Like Paulie Pastrami we say we want world peace, and yet, we create conflict in our homes, communities, and country.

(SLIDE) We like to say we are open-minded, but when it comes down to it, we think we are mostly, if not always, right. **Mirror, Mirror.**

When you have a camera and take a picture of something, with a few clicks on Photoshop you can completely change the image you just captured. If you paint the same thing, you can change the actual image through the interpretation you create on a canvas. But when you look in a mirror, what you see is what you get.

Today's scripture challenges us to reflect God's pure goodness and truth, to not alter it to reflect our own needs and desires. We are to hold our tongues, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. We are to remember that what we say and what we do reveal who we are, and that it matters, not for our salvation, but for the goodness of our lives and the sake of our world. Sometimes we just need to stop and follow the wisdom of Edgar Guest who said this, read it with me: "I'd rather **see a sermon** than hear one any day; I'd rather one walk with me than merely tell the way." If our faith doesn't take root in our lives, our religion is without meaning, and our words are like the "sounding brass" of the old hymn, a bunch of noise.

Mirror, Mirror.

Friends, let's not kid ourselves. Let's look at our reflection honestly. When we see our hair sticking up, let's smooth it down. If our tie is crooked, let's straighten it. If we have a smear of deep-fried snicker bar on a stick on our upper lip, we better wipe it off. Let's continue to celebrate who we are and who we can be. But let's let our faith have an impact on our lives, so that we reflect God's boundless understanding, patience, forgiveness, hope, and love to ourselves and to ALL people. Let's not just say it, let's do it, not because we HAVE to but because we GET to. And when we forget and act unkindly or unfairly or un-Christ-like, let's call each other on it. Life is too great to be crabby, life is too special not to share, life is too good not to rejoice. Let's not see following Jesus as a Sunday morning obligation, but as an everyday response to God's goodness out in the world, wherever that may be. **Mirror, Mirror.**

Thanks be to God. Amen.

