

Sermon Given at the Anglican Parish of Kingscliff, 4th Sunday in Lent. 15.03.2026

Scripture Texts: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; Eph 5:8-14; John 9:1-41.

Title: The Heart of the Matter: From Appearances to Encounter

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are experts at judging by appearances. It's our default setting. We scroll through social media and make snap judgments. We meet someone for the first time and, within seconds, our minds have filed them away based on how they look, how they dress, or how they speak. We look at our own lives and often see only the surface—the problems, the heartaches, the things that seem to be pursuing us.

But in the First Book of Samuel, the Lord gives the prophet a divine reality check. He sends Samuel to find a new king, and Samuel is immediately impressed by the tall, handsome son of Jesse. But God stops him and says, *“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature... for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”* (1 Samuel 16:7).

This is the great divide: our human tendency to fixate on outward appearances, and God's divine vision that penetrates straight to the heart. And today, on this Lenten journey, God invites us to see differently. He invites us to move from being judges of appearances to becoming missionaries of His love.

I. The Problem: Our Blindness to the Heart

We are so used to judging by appearance that we often miss the full picture. We see the failure, but not the struggle. We see the mistake, but not the repentance. We see the confident smile, but not the broken heart hidden behind it.

Because we don't see the whole picture, our part is not to judge. Our part is to be compassionate and merciful. We are to leave the ultimate judgment to the One who sees it all. But there's a deeper layer to this blindness. St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, reminds us that the darkness isn't just out there in the world. It also lurks in here, in our own hearts. He calls us to wake up and let Christ shine His light on those hidden corners. As the wonderful writer Etty Hillesum, who found God in the midst of a terrible darkness, wrote, *“We must destroy in ourselves what we want to destroy in others.”*

Lent is the season for this. It is a time for us to stop pointing fingers and to instead face the darkness within our own lives. It's a time to let Christ bring his light to our own pride, our own quick judgments, our own hidden fears.

II. The Comfort: What (or Who) is Pursuing You?

And this is where the Good News breaks in. It can be scary to look inward. We might feel that what pursues us is just that: heartache, problems, pain, trauma, sickness, mistakes, failures, and suffering. Life can feel like a chase, and we are the ones being hunted.

But then we turn to the beloved words of a young shepherd, David, a man after God's own heart. In the most famous psalm of all, Psalm 23, he paints a picture of perfect peace: green pastures, still waters, guidance, abundance, and a house in the Lord forever. And then he gives us that stunning final verse. Many translations say, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

But the original Hebrew is much more intense and powerful. The word for "follow" there is actually *radaph*. It's a strong word. It means to pursue, to chase, to hound.

David is saying, "Surely your goodness and loving kindness will pursue me, will hound me, will chase me down all the days of my life."

Think about that! We may feel like we are being chased by problems, by failure, by sorrow. But the reality for a child of God is that what is actually in hot pursuit is the relentless, pursuing mercy and loving-kindness of the Lord. You cannot outrun God's love. You cannot hide from it. It is the 'Hound of Heaven' at your back, and it is chasing you not with wrath, but with grace, mercy and loving kindness.

III. The Encounter: A Missionary is Born

This brings us to the man in today's Gospel from John, chapter 9. He was born blind. He lived his whole life judged by appearances. People saw him and saw only his blindness, his limitation. They assumed it was a punishment for sin.

But then he had an encounter. Jesus, the light of the world, came to him. He didn't see a case study in sin; he saw a heart ready to receive. And in that encounter, the man received not only physical sight but spiritual sight. He was "bowled over" by the power of Jesus.

Look at what happens next. The religious authorities, the ones with perfect physical sight, interrogate him. They argue. They try to confuse him. They are completely blind to who Jesus is. But the healed man? He becomes the first missionary of the text. He doesn't have a theology degree. He just tells his story. He says, "*One thing I know: I was blind, now I see!*" (John 9:25).

Christianity, my friends, is not a philosophy or a set of rules. It is an encounter with a person. It is a meeting with Jesus that amazes us, heals us, and gives our life a decisive new direction. To the extent that we have truly encountered him, to that same extent, we can tell others about him. We become, like the man born blind, missionaries of God's love.

Conclusion: Our Lenten Prayer

So, where does that leave us this Lent?

We are called to stop judging by appearances, to leave that judgment to God, and instead to extend compassion and mercy to all.

We are called to face the darkness in our own hearts, letting Christ's light expose it so he can transform us.

We are called to find comfort in the incredible truth that we are not chased by misfortune, but by the relentless, pursuing love of a merciful and loving God.

Our prayer this week should be simple and bold: *Lord, let me encounter you. Let me be so bowled over by your love that the scales fall from my eyes. Let that encounter transform me, dispel my darkness, and make me an authentic missionary of your love—not just in words, but in the way I see and treat everyone I meet. Let me see with your heart. Amen.*