



**OF MIRRORS, MOCKING, AND MINDSETS**  
**SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 50: 4-9a; MARK 11:1-11**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**March 25, 2018**  
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If America could look into a giant mirror—and see a reflection of ourselves, what would we see?

What would you see? Our scars, our strength, our tears, our wounds, our wisdom? What would you see?

Is looking closely at America too painful for you right now? Is the ugly American staring back at you someone too hard to countenance? Is the marching American making you uncomfortable? How about the consumer American? Or the angry American?

What about the young American? The 11 year olds and 16 year olds and 18 year olds, the 13 and 14 year olds who stood in front of throngs of other Americans yesterday and spoke truth to power? Can you see them in the mirror image of America looking back at you?

In Asheville we saw America yesterday—young people—black, brown, white—fed up, fired up, speaking up, standing up—marching on our streets—a spectacle of bodies and signs and emotion and the urgency of now. They had to do something—so they put out a call for us to show up, they put their feet to the pavement, and their voices to use.

Human beings converge, we march, we move when things become untenable. It takes some of us longer to get there than others—the more comfortable we are, the longer it takes us to move, to think our routines and our lives need to be altered.

Look in the mirror—and see who stares back at you.

Jesus is asking the world to look in the mirror—he's been asking for 2000 years. He wants us to really look at ourselves—he wants us to see what is hardest for us to see.

Our culpability is hard to see, yes. But that's not the hardest part to see.

Jesus wants us to see something even harder to see. He wants us to see our capacity for transformation—and that, my brothers and sisters, is the person we so often just can't see—the person who can change, the person who can be sanctified, the person who can be healed.

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The suffering servant of Isaiah knows who he is because he knows who God is.

The suffering servant of Isaiah endures humiliation, torture (pulling the hair of his beard out), insult—with a face set like flint. He did not flinch. And the reason he did not flinch was because he had learned—he had been open to learning—God taught him how to listen—how to learn. And in teaching him how to learn, God taught him how to teach.

Listen, brothers and sisters, to this profound invitation—to be a source of healing in this world, to be a faithful person in this world, you must open yourself up to become someone you have trouble believing you can be.

Listen to this profound invitation, Grace Covenant, to be faithful, you must be willing to change—to wake up to yourself as you are and to not stop there—but to wake up to the self you can become—a follower of a suffering God, a follower who moves—who is not afraid of death, of letting go, of leaving an old life behind.

God is inviting you to change—to not stay put, to not cling or grasp or protect. God is inviting you down this difficult road, to join in this processional—this road to Jerusalem, this road to the cross.

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But to really see Jesus we have to be willing to really see ourselves.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was full of familiar images and symbols—things that triggered his contemporaries to assume and accept some things that he was doing. The cloaks on the ground were a symbol of royalty, of coronation. Riding a colt who had never been ridden, was a sign of wonder—riding an unbroken colt is dangerous and somehow Jesus does it calmly, peacefully, confidently. Leafy branches, hosannas—these all provided mental shortcuts in Jesus' day for the import of this moment. Those same mental short cuts, those biases and expectations also made it hard for people to see what this procession, what Jesus' power were really all about.

In Mark's gospel Jesus silently makes his way into a city that will turn on him. Silently Jesus makes his way toward betrayal, toward brokenness, toward public execution.

Like the suffering servant, Jesus moves down this road without complaint, without taking on the role of victim, without defensiveness, without grasping because God taught him to be a teacher—God taught him who he was and who he could be and what kind of power he had.

The kind of power that heals as it reveals—as it tells us the truth about ourselves.

The most impressive thing about the marches across America yesterday is the way the youth organizers have refused to be coopted by the opportunistic demons that possess our capitalist culture.

We must all pray that they can continue to set their faces like flint—that they can continue to show us the mindset of true transformation. These youth have listened

to each other, sought out other perspectives, and been open to coalition building and even to critiquing their own biases and limitations.

For our country to change we have to give some things up, we have to let some things go, we have to tell the truth about the things that have really been hurting us.

Let's be honest with ourselves—guns are so important to this country right now for the same reasons other things that are killing us are important—opioids, racism, sexism, environmental degradation—all of these things are spawned from the same root cause—GREED.

The Parkland youth are holding up a mirror to us about much more than gun violence—they are teaching us about white privilege, about politics, about how we worship money and fame, about our biases and what moves us to do things.

And they are teaching us some even harder lessons—about what does not move us—about how differently we respond when violence happens to people that look like us, than when violence happens to people who don't look like us.

62.6 of the students exposed to shootings in schools are children of color.<sup>1</sup>

Schools are not the only places where kids are vulnerable to gun violence. On average, one child is injured or killed every hour of every day in America by gun violence.

We rarely hear about most of those incidents. In our minds, there is a mental and emotional short cut we take because of racialized bias—some part of us, whether conscious or not, thinks we don't have to pay as close attention or that they must be use to it or that it is somehow their fault and we can protect ourselves, we can exempt ourselves from the danger. These mental and emotional shortcuts are often not conscious and that makes them even more dangerous.

Without our conscious decision to deal with these biases, our reactions will continue. We will continue to see movements like #BlackLivesMatter as offensive and dangerous while we tend to see #MarchForOurLives as inspiring and constructive. And those same mental short cuts obscure our ability to see Jesus—to see who he really is, and where he is calling us to go.

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Banneker High School in Birmingham, AL, is one of 4 schools that have experienced two shootings since Columbine in 1999. Banneker is attended almost completely by kids of color. In schools like Banneker many kids show the same signs of stress that combat veterans display: hyper vigilance, exaggerated startle reflexes, trouble concentrating, and other signs of PTSD.

At a Birmingham Middle School a few weeks ago, sixth grader, Javon Davies, told his mother they spent the day on lock down because someone had threatened to shoot up the school. There had been several incidents in Birmingham schools in the weeks leading up to this lock down.

Javon and his friend decided there was a good chance they would die by gun shot at school so they decide to write their wills.

Javon's friend's will reads this way:

"Mom, I want to give my friend Javon every thing that I own that includes the xbox and games and controllers and all that comes with it."

And Javon's will lists "his PlayStation 4, his Xbox 360 and his dirt bike." He wrote:

"I love you my whole Family you mean the most to me. You gave me the clothes on my back, you fed me, and you were always by my side."

Javon is 12.

10 year old, Dezmond Floyd, an African American fifth grader in Houston, TX, tells his mother, Tanai Bernard, what he has decided from all the active shooter drills in his school.<sup>2</sup>

"The teacher is supposed to lock the door, turn the lights off and push this big desk behind the door. The first time I did an active shooter drill I saw her having a hard time with it, so I decided to come help her. Because if she doesn't get the desk on the door in time, the intruder can open it."

His mother asks, "So what do you do next after you push the table?"

"The class is supposed to stand on the back wall. But I decided to stand in front of the class, because I want to take the bullet and save my friends,"

"Does your teacher ask you to stand in front of the class?" Tanai says.

"No. My life matters but, it's kind of like, there's one person that can come home to the family, or there can be 22 people that come home to a family."

"Do you know why it's hard for me to accept that?" Tanai says.

"Because I'm such a young age, I shouldn't really be giving my life up."

"Right," Tanai says. "If there's any a time that I want you to be selfish, it's then. I need you to come home. So would you still stand in front of your friends, even with me telling you not to?"

"Yes," Dezmond says. "I get that you would want me to come home, but it's really not a choice that you can make. It's a choice that I have to make."

"I see now that there's nothing I could say that would change your mind," Tanai says. "I just hope that it never comes to that."

"Talking about this makes me feel sad, but you raised a good person,"  
Dezmond says.

Javon and Dezmond and the kids from Parkland are holding up a mirror so we can see our culpability, yes—but we must not avert our gaze until we also see how we can be transformed.

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Who do you see when you look in the mirror? Where will you be in the crowd of Jesus followers?

Our Lenten journey started on Ash Wed—a day of repentance and truth telling about our mortality. That is the day so many students in Parkland FL were changed forever. And millions of feet processed yesterday because of what can rise up out of ashes when the world is ready to find a better way.

The week ahead is Holy for many reasons—sacred memory defines the stories we tell, the rituals we observe, the road we say we are willing to travel.

But this year, we are called to let the holiness of this week penetrate us like never before—the road to Jerusalem is not just a memory, or a mirror, or a mindset—it is a miracle—a miracle because it has the power to change us all.

When the crowd's cheering grows silent, and we are left to face ourselves, to face each other, the truth calls to us to proceed not with caution, but with courage.

The Lord God has opened our ears. The Lord God has taught us how to learn. Let us not be rebellious. Let us not turn backward.

Thanks be to God.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/us-school-shootings-history/?utm\\_term=.9dd62f2f0872](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/us-school-shootings-history/?utm_term=.9dd62f2f0872)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/02/18/586447438/how-to-talk-with-kids-about-terrible-things>