

"WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET"
October 27, 1991

TEXT: John 1:42 ". . . Jesus looked at him and said, 'So you are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter).'

As you will see in a few minutes, my sermon this morning is firmly grounded in the Bible, but the idea for it came from a very different source. I first began thinking about it in the summer of 1980, when Mrs. Muth and I were privileged to attend a New England summer theater production of The Man of LaMancha.

For those of you who are not familiar with that work, it is a very powerful musical based upon Miguel de Cervantes' epic novel, Don Quixote. The play, like the book, chronicles the adventures of an aged nobleman named Alonso Quijana, who has become deluded by too much reading. As a result of his delusion he believes that he is a knight named Don Quixote de La Mancha, and he sets out to right the wrongs of the world.

Now, because he is mad --or perhaps because he is saner than the rest of us-- he sees things quite differently from the way we see them. Instead of a windmill he sees a giant ogre. In a herd of sheep he sees an enemy army. In a run-down country inn he sees the castle of a fine nobleman. And, most importantly, instead of a disreputable scullery maid named Aldonza he sees the Lady Dulcinea. In spite of her protests, and abundant evidence to the contrary, he insists that she is noble, chaste and pure.

The effect which this delusion --or shall we call it a vision-- has upon Aldonza, herself, is as wonderful as it is powerful. At first, she is amused, as are those who know her. Later, she becomes angry. Later still, she feels threatened and afraid. But, finally, she is convinced. And, at the end of the play, just after Don Quixote dies, his "squire" calls her Aldonza, and, drawing herself up in quiet dignity, she replies, "My name is Dulcinea."

As I watched that drama unfold, it occurred to me that this is just what God does with us. While we insist upon seeing things as they are, God sees them as they could be. On that fateful day, perhaps as much as twenty billion years ago, when the universe was created, God looked out over the chaos and the nothingness and did not see chaos and nothingness. He saw trees. He saw people. He saw love. He saw all the beauty and wonder of the world as we know it and all that greater beauty and wonder yet to appear. Perhaps that is why the Bible says, "And God

everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."
(Genesis 1:31)

Later on, in the book of Exodus, we come to that day in the mountains of Sinai when God did not see an old, cowardly, stuttering sheep-herder, but the man who would lead his people out of Egypt. And God said, "Moses, I have a job for you." And Moses very humanly replied, "Who? Me? You don't understand, God. I'm no leader. I can't even talk properly." But God insists, and in the end Moses, like Aldonza, is convinced and returns to Egypt to lead his people out of slavery.

Still later, in the book of Judges, God saw a man named Gideon, hiding from the Midianites. But what God saw was not a frightened nobody. He saw a mighty general, and He said, "Gideon, I have a job for you." And Gideon replied, "Who? Me? You don't understand, God. My family is the least of all the families in Israel, and I am the least of my father's family." But God refused to see things as they were. He insisted on what could be. And Gideon led his people to victory against their oppressors.

And later still, God looked at a young man, perhaps only a boy, but He did not see someone too young to make a difference. He saw a mighty prophet. And He said, "Jeremiah, I have a job for you." And Jeremiah replied, "Who? Me? You don't understand, God. I'm too young for that kind of responsibility." But God insisted. And Jeremiah became a great prophet.

And, in this morning's scripture, we see the same thing happen again. Jesus looked at Simon and said, "So you are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas," which means Peter or the Rock. Anyone who knew Peter at the time would have been amazed. He was no "rock." He was impetuous. He was hot-headed. He was inconsistent. He was undependable. But Jesus saw in Peter not what he was, but what he could be. As he did with Zacchaeus. As he did with Mary Magdalene. As he does with you and me.

For I am convinced that, as He looks at us this morning, our Lord does not see half-timid, sometimes selfish, sometimes guilty men and women. He sees heroes of the faith. He sees a mighty church. Not because we often give Him much cause to see us that way, but because He sees not what is, but what could be. Because He is committed to the possible, not the actual. And He is calling to each of us this morning, just as He called to Peter, just as He called to Zacchaeus, just as He called to Paul.

He is calling us to be His People. He is calling us to be His Church. We can come up with all the excuses we want. We can say, as men and women have said throughout the ages, "Who? Me? You don't understand, Lord. I'm not important. I'm no hero. And, while this a nice church, it's just one church. What can we do?" But God is committed to the possible --in us, in this church, in this community, in our world. And by the power of His

vision for us, He gives us strength to become what He has seen in us.

I know that I am far from perfect. I suspect some of you may be, too. I know this church has its problems and its limitations and that it will continue to have them. But God is not interested in our weaknesses. He is not interested in our delusion that reality is the way things have to be. By the power of His vision He calls us to be what we could be. And part of the task --and part of the joy-- of every Christian and of every church is to discover and fulfill God's vision.

But there is more. Just as God's vision of what could be empowers us to become more than we have ever been before, so He wants us to see --to insist upon-- the possibilities around us. In people, in circumstances, in relationships. To see the reality of what could be instead of always being shackled to what is now.

It may not be easy. Not everyone will respond the way we want them to, just as we do not always respond the way God wants us to. And, yet, if we believe in the possibilities of life, as God believes in us, somehow that potential is empowered to become reality. How could Aldonza ever have become Dulcinea if Don Quixote had not seen that in her, if he had not insisted, against all odds, that it was there, if he had not believed that the reality was Dulcinea and Aldonza only a delusion?

How else can the Aldonza in us, and the Aldonza world in which we live, ever become what God intended when He created us? In the words of Flip Wilson, "What you see is what you get." See misery and poverty, cruelty and selfishness, anger and hatred, and you will surely find them. In yourself, in others, in the world. See understanding and compassion, see love and nobility, see courage and justice, and perhaps they will appear.

Yes, there may be disappointments. There may be frustrations. There may be times when your vision brings you pain. But one thing is certain. Without vision, there will be no Dulcinea. There will only be Aldonza, for us, for others, and for the world. "What you see is what you get."