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The love of God makes us visible, even if we feel invisible.

Feel invisible? What do I mean by that? I don't mean that people truly *are* invisible. What I do mean is that, sometimes people have something happen to them that they can't easily share with others. And this thing that happens to them changes their understanding of themselves in some way. So, they're radically changed by this thing that has happened to them, yet this change can't be seen, and so their suffering is silent, and they may become isolated.

I've heard parents talk about this. Specifically, parents whose children have died. People look at them and see the successful, capable, confident people they truly are. Yet, they have been forever changed inside by the loss of their child, and they bear the mark of that experience silently, invisibly, because, unless you've been through it yourself, it's not something you can really understand. Those of you who have friended me on Facebook found out about my friend, Lisa, whose only son Teddy died unexpectedly this week. Lisa is so tremendously gifted as a priest that you'd never guess at this invisible burden she bears.

Last weekend I was witness to another invisible wound. Instead of being with you here at Christ Church, I helped bring together people from South Sudan who are seeking to prevent a new genocide. As you may know, the new nation of South Sudan has been torn apart by violence and vengeance. But, I had the privilege of gathering with people from four different tribal groups (Dinka, Nuer, Equatorial, and Nuba Mountain) to encourage them to talk about how they could help build peace. And, sure enough, we found examples of how people were cooperating across the divisions between tribes to bring water and goods to people so that they could survive and dream a future.

But, there was an invisible burden among us. One of the facilitators asked the women present why women weren't taking a more prominent role in peace building in South Sudan and in the Nuba Mountains. One very courageous woman then stood up and explained that, when women try to exercise leadership outside

their tribe, they are assaulted, they are attacked, and sometimes they even lose their lives. So then, not only is the whole nation deprived of their leadership, but also the women carry this invisible scar, this invisible burden, they carry it forever.

When we carry invisible scars, we begin to *feel* invisible.

Zaccheus felt invisible. He was the chief tax collector for his area. And, as such, in accordance with the practice of the day, he sometimes put a surcharge on people's taxes, an extra charge that was burdensome. And in doing so, he made himself a public enemy, an outcast. Zaccheus was invisible to the people in his community. His humanity was invisible.

But the story of Jesus walking by Zaccheus and *finding* him says all we need to know about how God is with us. Zaccheus is high in the air, above Jesus, because he has climbed up into that sycamore tree in order to see. But Jesus knows to look up. Jesus knows how to look for and *see* Zaccheus. And in that one act of looking, Jesus says it all.

Nothing that happens to us in this life, none of the bad things, and none of the good things, nothing that happens to us makes us invisible to God. And, in fact, when God looks upon us and we realize we are *seen*, God connects us to others. And when we're connected to other people, we feel like what we truly are: beloved of God, drawn into the fellowship of the beloved, never alone again.

My friend Lisa, whose son Teddy died this week, will never be alone again. She donated each one of his organs to people needing transplants, and she will always know herself to be connected to the family of people she has enabled to live because of that decision.

My friends from Sudan and South Sudan know they are not alone, in part because they told of their experience of being attacked and humiliated and we did not shrink away or treat them like we didn't want to know. But also these women are not alone because they now have partnerships for doing good.

This is the way God works, when heaven touches earth and we are changed: the wounds of the broken-hearted are healed, the captive is set free, the blind see, and

we are seen. No matter what that one thing is that causes us to feel invisible, we are seen by God and brought into the fellowship of the beloved by God's own love.

Our lament – or sadness -- is turned to joy, because God is faithful. That's the vision the prophet Habakkuk wrote of, the vision that was written so big that a runner could read it while he was taking it to the next village: God is faithful. No matter what the burden is that you bear today, no matter what the thing is that is the invisible wound, no matter what the thing is that causes you to feel invisible to others, know that Jesus sees you and has gathered you into the fellowship of the beloved.

And let these words from the end of the Book of Habakkuk be your words:

“... yet I will rejoice in the Lord;

I will exult in the God of my salvation.

God, the Lord, is my strength;

He makes my feet like the feet of a deer,

And makes me tread upon the heights.”

Amen.