

## “The truth in the mirror”

- I suppose ever since humans realized that what we saw in the water or a piece of polished metal was actually a reflection of ourselves
  - We have been fascinated by it
  - And we are not the only species: <sup>1</sup>
  - All great apes, bottle nose dolphins, killer whales, elephants, and even European Magpies all pass the mirror test
    - A measure of intelligence and self-awareness, the ability to see a reflection and know it is you, rather than another person
  - It is no surprise then that mirrors and reflections hold a prominent place in our mythology, lore and fiction
  - From the Greeks we have Narcissus, who saw his reflection, fell in love with it, and died there unable to leave it
  - Vampires supposedly have no reflection, revealing the truth that they no longer have a soul
  - And finally, one of my more favorite mirrors in fiction, the Mirror of Erised from Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone <sup>2</sup>
    - That is desire spelled backwards
    - This mirror reveals the unseen and often unconscious truth
    - It was enchanted to show the viewer’s their heart’s greatest desire
    - Dumbledore warns Harry to not stay with the mirror too long, for many, like Narcissus, have wasted away their lives longing for what the mirror has shown them
    - The trouble with this mirror is that in showing people what they wanted most, it only really pointed out what they did not have
    - It exposes an emptiness and a vulnerability that too often we do not like seeing

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror\\_test#Animal\\_species\\_capable\\_of\\_passing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_test#Animal_species_capable_of_passing)

<sup>2</sup> [http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Mirror\\_of\\_Erised](http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Mirror_of_Erised)

- While mirrors may not actually be enchanted show us our deepest desire, or help us detect vampires
- They do reflect the truth about us.
- We get to see ourselves as we are, rather than the internal image we keep of ourselves
- There is truth in a mirror's reflection
- I feel as though over the last few weeks, Jesus has held up a mirror for us as he has expounded on God's law and God's desire for us
  - Much like the mirror in Harry Potter, this mirror of faithfulness shows us what we do not have, and what we are not
  - It exposes us and reveals a truth: we are nothing like what God wants us to be
  - We fall short, we devalue ourselves and other people
  - Do we really believe that the meek and the peacekeepers are valued in God's kingdom?
  - Do we turn the other cheek, making ourselves vulnerable to yet another hurtful jab
  - Do we really base our lives around our love for others, rather than our self-pursuits?
  - My reflection is not as pretty as I would like
  - The mirror Jesus holds up for us is not only in his sermon on the mount, but in the example of how he lived his life
  - The mirror shows us what God wants us to be- what we are created to be.
    - And also shows us just how far we are away from it.
  - This is sin: that while we are made in God's image, we are not very good reflections of God
- Preaching about sin is not my favorite topic, I promise you
  - I am sure that I am not alone here
  - There is a great temptation to push through this discomfort and get to Easter as soon as possible
  - But let's resist that quick fix. Let's dwell in the ashes for a little bit.
  - This season of Lent is designed to help us to take a hard look in the mirror and see us for who we really are: sin and all
  - See ourselves as God sees, and then to ask for forgiveness for our inability to be what we know we should be
  - It's no wonder ashes have become such an inseparable part of this day

- Sometimes the only response to our own reflection is to lament, because it seems hopeless
- Putting ashes on one's head is an ancient act symbolizing the worst kind of grief and sadness one can experience
- It is found in the Old Testament
- It is a sign of desperation- that we are no better than the dust of the earth
- And indeed, our lives are short and one day we will return there
- Coupled with a contrite heart, they can be a powerful reminder of our absolute need for God
- But there is good news even on Ash Wednesday
- That even in the darkest of times when we see our reflection what it is: very far from what God created us to be
- There is still hope.
- Those ashes on the forehead are in the shape of a cross, because it is through that cross- the life, death and resurrection of Jesus- that we have hope
- God has provided a way, and promised that when we repent, we are forgiven
- And the ashes in the shape of a cross remind us that we are still God's children, and that nothing can separate us from God's love
- Now for hundreds of years, Christians have approached this season of penitence with a fast of some kind
  - While there are no real guidelines on this tradition, it has varied over the years, I encourage you to consider it
  - Self denial, much like sermons on sin, is not our favorite thing
  - But for the last few days it has occurred to me just how important this tradition might be for you and me today
  - Because let's be honest: you and I are rarely denied anything
  - Think about it- you want strawberries in the dead of winter- just go to the grocery store
    - You'll also find food from all over the world, and from every season of year
    - Also find 10 different types of peanut butter, just because we can
  - If something doesn't go our way, call customer service, and chances are they will fix it, or try to make it better
  - We get to live in one of the most free countries and societies that have ever existed,

- Where we are guaranteed life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
- And personal autonomy is one of the highest virtues
- The truth is, we are not accustomed to people telling us “no” about much of anything
- So I say, this year, tell **yourself** “no” about something, deny yourself, give something up, start a fast
- Self-denial, when coupled with prayer, is a great way to increase self-awareness and will power<sup>3</sup>
- And throughout these forty days, when that craving comes up for the one thing we cannot have
- Remember that our soul longs for God in just the same way, it is just that we are often not as aware of it as we are our physical needs and wants
- I am also aware that not everyone experiences privilege in the same way, and maybe fasting is not the right approach for you this year
- So take something on- give up some time: set aside time to pray, read a book, volunteer, clean out your closets to help the cold and homeless
- Whatever it is, do more than a self-help exercise, do something that gets to the core of who we are and who God is
- And will bring you closer to God
- If a mirror shows us our true reflection, then Ash Wednesday should show us our souls
  - To embark on a Lenten journey is to take a hard look in that mirror, and see ourselves as we truly are
  - Broken, yet not without hope
  - Desperate, yet with faith that God will help us
  - Sinful, yet redeemable.
  - May God show us the truth this Lent, and may we have the courage to look into the reflection and see it
  - May our hearts greatest desire be to grow more and more into the full reflection of God

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://ideas.time.com/2012/02/23/lent-and-the-science-of-self-denial/>