

I want to tell you about something – and it feels like a confession – because it’s about a really stupid movie I went to a few weeks ago at the theatre. It’s a movie called Cloverfield – has anyone else seen it? – well, what it is, is basically a remaking of the old Godzilla movie – you know, Godzilla: the huge lizard – as tall as a skyscraper – ferocious – causing mayhem, wreaking havoc; in the original, I think Godzilla attacked Tokyo, but for this remake the setting was modern-day NYC. And when I say it was a really stupid movie, it’s not that this came as a surprise to me – I KNEW it was going to be stupid, but I went anyway – and I confess that it was great fun! – just to see them try to pull off this crazy idea. And how it was done was to film the entire movie through the perspective of a personal camcorder – that is the viewpoint you have for the whole movie – of this one person encountering/filming this situation – so the picture is bouncing around, and the camera is pointed at odd angles and picking up strange sounds – which can happen when you are being chased by a huge lizard through Manhattan! And due to this camera technique I read one review that said there were reports of some people actually becoming ill as they watched the movie – motion sickness, I guess.

Well – the object of this sermon is not to encourage you to see that movie or to talk any more about Godzilla – and the object of this sermon is certainly not to make you ill. The idea is, however, to invite us to look at the story we’ve heard from the Gospel of John with a similar sort of first-person perspective – through the lens of those who encountered the events we’re told about – there is something about that kind of perspective which may be a gimmick for a movie, but which I am hoping can be a helpful way inside the story for us. But rather than just one first-person viewpoint, I want to play with the idea of double vision in this healing of a blind man – and look at things from the viewpoint of two of the characters involved – the man who is healed, and the Pharisees who hear about it. See what you can see from each of them...

First the man – born blind:

*It's rude to talk about someone as if they aren't even there – so I think it's fair for me to say in this case that those followers of Jesus were quite rude. They said: “so who's the sinner - this blind man or his parents? – whose sin is to blame for this pathetic blind man?” – talking about me as I sat right there! It's not that such comments were anything new to me – somehow people seem to think that when you're blind, you're deaf too. So I've heard it all before from various religious types – the sin discussion – and it used to make me angry. But eventually all I cared about is if they're going to give me money or not – they can call me a sinner all they want if they just give me some coins.*

*But the rabbi, Jesus, took a unique approach: he said the blindness was not about my sin – which was different, and good – but then instead of coins in my hands he put mud in my eyes – and sight in my eyes too. I am certain you cannot imagine what it is like to go from such darkness to such light – to see for the first time – the miracle that brought to me the miracle that sight is... But then the questions - again from the religious folks: “who did this? how? where is he? what is he?” And it was clear to my new found eyes and my finely tuned ears that these were not questions of support but of suspicion. I've just been healed, and the religious experts want to know if it's a good thing or not! Despite a lifetime as a blind beggar I've managed to keep my sense of humor – others would call it sarcasm. But I got so fed up I finally invited the Pharisees to become followers of Jesus too!*

*That didn't go over so well – they kicked me out. And I ended up meeting Jesus again – and remember, this was the first time I actually saw him. You can imagine my gratitude, but it was clear Jesus had more on his mind than that now my eyes could see. Being blind and then being able to see – that is a big deal. But realizing when it happens that it is about not only me, but about who God is – that is a very big deal. And I knelt down and worshiped Jesus.*

And now from a different perspective - through a different lens – that of the Pharisees:

*We have lot of responsibility – and it's not what you might think. I don't mean all of the work we have to do: all the details to attend to at the temple – making sure that the festivals and sacrifice and worship goes as it's supposed to for the people who come from near and far every day to Jerusalem. It's a lot of work – and we are honored, blessed, to do it. But the true responsibility that we have – the weight of responsibility we feel most heavily – is to keep the faith pure. Our responsibility is to protect what our ancestors have given us, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses – what the LORD has given to us, to God's people. And we have to be very careful – it's not easy keeping faith pure in this world.*

*So when a man comes to us claiming to be healed from blindness – and when this happens on the Sabbath – and when it turns out it is the Rabbi Jesus who is behind it all – then we have to be very careful. I don't think you can imagine, can truly appreciate, the challenges we face in keeping the faith pure. There are the pagan Romans and the pagan Jews who collaborate with them – chipping away at the faith. There are those who hold on to some parts of the Torah, the Law, but not to all of it – chipping away at the faith. There are Rabbis like Jesus who get the people excited with false hopes of glory for Israel – filling their heads with false truths – chipping away at the faith.*

*This is nothing new – it has always been this way – the ways of the LORD have always had to be protected from those who would destroy them. And we have learned through the generations - from Moses to today- that the only way to stay pure is not to bend at all – never to waver. It's not just how things appear that is important, it is how they truly are: the Sabbath is the Sabbath, and God makes no exceptions. If Jesus was a true Rabbi, he would know that... So, we weren't making an example of that pathetic man – he has his sight: to God be the praise! But he didn't say that, didn't see that – so we did what we had to do – condemned him... It is our responsibility – it's because of our faith in God – it's about who God is - and our vigilance for purity will never end.*

Two different ways to look at these events...and what I have found in listening to this story is that it is only when we can see what is happening from both perspectives that we get a fuller picture of what is expressed here....

As you listened to those viewpoints, I hope you didn't hear one as all good and one as all bad – but perhaps you did – it's quite natural for us to be in favor of the friends of Jesus and against those who oppose him. And certainly as the story is given to us it is clear with whom we are to agree and disagree. But what I hope we can do is at least understand something of what is going on with each perspective – something of what is at stake. And even more, as we do that, I hope we can start to see that both perspectives are present within us - in me, in you, in the church...and I'd like to start with the Pharisees...

It is clear in the life of the early church – and that is the group for whom this story is told – that they needed to see how the structure and power of the Jewish institutions of faith had become a way to blind people from seeing God revealed in Jesus Christ. But the faith itself – the story of God revealed to Israel – that was a good thing – it is the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Israel, Pharisees – the faith that itself leads to Jesus – to the revelation of the Messiah. It is within the faith of the Pharisees that Jesus Christ is revealed.

And that is where I find sympathy for the Pharisees – for their viewpoint: when you are the keeper of the faith, the very faith you hold can make it difficult to see – protecting the faith can easily become a focus in itself, losing sight of the God from whom that faith comes - a God who does not need protection, but attention - focusing on who God is and what God's Spirit is about. And it is that insight that the story speaks to the church today – because as we listen, we are the ones who hold the structure and the power of faith, of religion. The early church was faithful in seeing through the obstacles of religious power –but in that success, it soon became an ever-present challenge for the church through the generations to keep that perspective. It is so easy to turn from seeing who God is to protecting what we've been given; it is so difficult to turn from seeing how God is at work in the world to seeing only God at work in us – difficult for church-going Pharisees like us.

And then there is the blind man – the man healed and given his sight. Clearly in the life of the early church – this is them! And an understanding of the healing, the vision given, is that this is a miracle shared by all who follow Jesus – all who recognize him, who are given the sight to see him as Messiah. That is in no way meant to downplay the significance of this miracle for the blind man – it is to put the miracle in the context of what the story is there to tell: that what is at stake for all who are encountered by this story is the same - blindness and sight, darkness and light, waywardness and faithfulness - seeing who Jesus is. Which means that as soon as sight is given, it is also about sharing in the rejection such sight brings: that to be given sight by Jesus is to be put at odds with the established powers of the world – that is the story of the early church, following Jesus' way of life in a world held in the powers of death – and that is the story for all who are given sight by Jesus.

And as much as I am certain that we are the Pharisees in this story – I am also certain that we see through the eyes of this blind man – this healed man - too. For you and I to be gathered here today – it is a miracle – the vision of faith that has been passed on through the generations and by God's grace gathered us here – some of us seeing clearly, some quite fuzzy, some seeking, some finding – each of us knowing varied states of vision. And gathered here believing that the Spirit of Christ is at work in each one of us in some way - revealing, showing, giving life over against the entrenched powers of death in this world. God continues to break through both religion and a blinded world, revealing Jesus Christ and calling broken people to follow with the miracle of sight – of faith.

So where does that leave us – with some kind of double vision? Two perspectives giving a view as wobbly as that movie I described? – well, maybe sometimes it is like that. But mostly it is that these two perspectives tell us together what is at stake in us and in this world. And it really comes down to this: we don't worship rules – we don't follow religion – and we aren't meant to remain in the dark. The heart of my faith, of yours, of the church, is always the same – to see that Jesus is the Messiah – for God to reveal God's self to us in

Jesus Christ - and it is through him that we see true life. More than double vision, it's a double miracle: God is revealed in Christ, and seeing that gift of life we, blind beggars healed, respond in worship; and worshipping Christ this day, we are called to be the lens through which the world sees Christ in us. AMEN.