

New Hope Sermon The view from the Other Side 9/23/18

In our new sermon series I want to challenge us to see Scripture stories differently. Seeing differently like Snoopy and Woodstock did. Really, how we view life's circumstances and ourselves, and even God, is all how we see. It is about perspective. The tendency of some is to argue from our different perspectives about how right we are, but then we cut off so much that God wants to say to us.



Take this “corrected version of the world map – from an Australian perspective. Why do maps always show the north as

up? For those who don't just take it for granted, the common answer is that Europeans made the maps and so it was logical to them to have North America and Europe at the top. But there's really no good reason for the north to claim top-notch cartographic real estate over any other bearing, as an examination of old maps from different places and periods can confirm. The profound arbitrariness of our current cartographic conventions was made evident by McArthur's Universal Corrective Map of the World, an iconic “upside down” view of the world that recently celebrated its 35th anniversary. Launched by Australian Stuart McArthur on Jan. 26, 1979, Australia Day, this map is made to challenge our casual acceptance of European perspectives as global norms.



Sometimes the differences are an issue of language, understood differently in different contexts. A pastor visiting Thailand on a mission trip wrote, “in the city of Phuket, I saw a sign hanging outside a doctor's office. The words in Thai were followed by an English translation which proudly proclaimed: FAIRLY RELIABLE DOCTOR. He adds, “I don't think the phrase quite conveyed what the doctor had in mind. Something important got lost in the translation (because of the word “fairly.”) For the Thai speakers, I'm sure the Thai words properly advertised that the doctor could be trusted to deliver professional medical services. But from the perspective of English speakers,” if he's only “fairly reliable” I will not go to him! Bruce Ennd, Ministry Compass Perspective fall 2007, vol. 36, no. 2 pp. 263-268).

All this is an introduction to our new sermon series: “Life from the other side, a look at how the disciples experienced following Jesus.” It occurred to me that we traditionally read and interpret the gospels from Jesus' perspective and the perspective of how the gospel writers depict him in terms of what he said and did. But I believe we have very important lessons for our own faith walk when we approach the stories from how the disciples might have experienced following Jesus.

Our goal is summarized in this Native American saying: “To understand a man, you must first walk a mile in his moccasin.” Paraphrased in our context it would be ‘to understand the difficulties, the challenges and the joys of being a disciple of Jesus, we need to walk a year in the disciples' shoes.’ We will do that through the gospel of Mark.

Our prayer is: “My God continually improve our vision. Not only for our own spiritual benefit but also so that we can give our fellows spiritual travelers some idea of what it means to see with the eyes of God.” (Enns, Ibid.)

Why is this important? Because “there are some people who see a great deal and some who see little in the same things.” (T. H. Huxley). I hope we will be those who “see a great deal” as we look through the disciples' eyes.

So, here's the challenge: How do you read Scripture? What happens to you when you put yourselves in the shoes of the people we read about?

In Bible study a few weeks ago we looked at the story of Zacchaeus and Jesus. It really is amazing that Jesus called out this tax collector who obviously had amassed great wealth for himself and his family from his exorbitant tax practices – at the expense of his own countrymen. They despised him as a lackey of the Roman government. Yet Jesus stopped underneath the tree Zacchaeus climbed to get a better look at Jesus and told Zacchaeus to come down because he had to be at Zacchaeus’s house that day. That encounter and request for Jesus to come to his house made Zacchaeus pledge to repay all those he had swindled 4 times over. That was huge and we talked about what may have happened inside Zacchaeus to cause him to rectify things so completely. Seeing the story from Zacchaeus’ perspective changes the dynamics of the story and made us ask ‘What about us?’ Has our encounter with Jesus brought about that same kind of transformation and restitution of our wrongs to others? A question worth pondering.

Let’s try this approach with another biblical character: Esther. What happens if we take the Jewish historical story of Queen Esther and look at what happened from her perspective – what might have been her feelings, her fears, her faith-filled decisions? How did she change history for her people because of her approach to the king in a context where her advance was normally forbidden and could even cause her death if he was displeased?

This is the approach of empathy as we walk in another’s shoes. Empathy is seeing with the eyes of another. It is listening with the ears of another. And feeling with the heart of another.

On a post on empathy on the internet the Consultant, Cheryl Austin, said “In a freak accident while doing yard work, I broke my foot. My already complicated, stress-filled life ratcheted up to a new level of difficulty I never thought possible. [She ended up using a knee scooter to get around and discovered a new perspective that the disabled experience as people look down at them, avoid them, are uncomfortable around them or treat them without the normal attitudes of care they give to well-bodied people.] She says, “As the weeks became months and my foot still had not healed, I was getting pretty frustrated with life in general. One day, a clerk offered to carry an item out to my car for me. I had been hurting pretty badly that day and was at my wits end. During the journey to the car, the clerk told me that earlier that week, her sister just had her leg amputated below the knee. That put things into perspective for me. I had encountered a multitude of personal hardships in the previous weeks, including a car accident which totaled my car, and the death of my long-time pet, but I realized in that moment all I have to be thankful for. No more pity parties for me! I felt a lot happier all of a sudden. No matter how bad you think things may be, there is always someone who’s got it worse. Henry David Thoreau said, “Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other’s eyes for an instant?” In an odd way, I am thankful for having broken my foot because it forced me to see life differently – to see people differently – and also to approach problems differently. June 11, 2017 Cheryl Austin, Consultant and Technical Writer CharlesGlassmanMD.com - fb.com/CoachMD

This empathetic approach is the approach we want to take towards the disciples’ experiences as they followed Jesus. It really wasn’t easy for them, as it is not easy for us, and we want to look at that other side of the reality in story after story in Mark. Just one example shows what they faced: Jesus continually upended everyone and everything around him:

The religious traditions of his day – and what the Pharisees said was how to please God.

The religious (and seemingly scriptural) interpretations of what the Messiah would do.

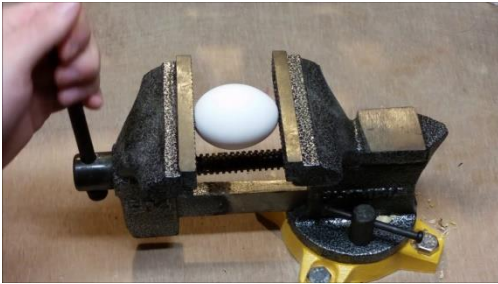
The cultural traditions about men not talking to women alone, of religious leaders separating themselves from the poor and the “sinful.”

The disciples’ own expectations of who He was

His perspective on life and on God the Father and his relationship to the Father.

We will see there was one incident after another when he “broke the rules” – where did that leave the disciples? So the empathetic question is: **What kind of stress – internal or external – do you think the disciples experienced as they followed Jesus?**

This stress lens is a very relevant way to connect with their stories because in our day there seems to be an epidemic of stress among us with all the various expectations put on us from our families, our understanding of biblical obedience, our professors, our classmates and the seemingly unending list of assignments. Anxiety disorder is rampant, depression is a major concern on campus as the semester wears on and stress of all sorts weighs us down. In fact, an article in the Wheaton Magazine last September corroborates this disturbing trend. In Dr. Anthony Bradley's chapel address that month he "addressed the startling and uncomfortable fact that millennials are the most stressed generation in history. Citing the American College Health Association, he noted that one in six college students has been diagnosed with or treated for anxiety...He called attention to a level of perfectionism that is 'toxically weaving itself' through campuses across the nation'... Dr. Whetstone the director of the Wheaton College Counseling Center agrees. He noted that Wheaton College students have a particular issue with 'internalization,' or suppressing negative thoughts and feelings. Implicit and explicit pressure to achieve perfection academically and spiritually feeds students' innate tendency to hide imperfections, such as mental health concerns, from one another.'"(Kelsey Plankeel, Wheaton Magazine, 'Mental Health at Wheaton,' Sept. 2017, p. 35).



Did the earliest disciples feel like that? What kind of pressures did they face? And from this graphic, who was holding the handle that increased that pressure in their day? In our day?

And this issue is not just relevant for college students and grads. In a survey of over 1,000 American adults in January 2001 66% say they often feel stressed; 60% say they feel time is crunched, 49%

feel pressured to succeed and 48% feel overwhelmed. (Lori Joseph and Bob Laird, "American Working Too Hard, USA Today Snapshot. January 2001.)

There's a saying that Your faith can move mountains and your doubt can create them. The disciples had times of confusion and severe doubt along the way. But they also had faith (**pp**) a faith that does not make things easy but makes them possible. History tells us that eleven of the 12 disciples stayed with Jesus and eventually laid their lives down for him after his ascension. Countless others did as well.

In their case and in ours it was all about Jesus. He invited them and he invites us to *Come to Him – all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest*. Soul rest. A quiet mind. A settled heart. And they went forward with Him every time that took Him up on that invitation. They went forward because He said to them: *Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me for I am meek and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls*. Mt. 11:

A yoke. If you are not from farming background, this may be an analogy that goes right over your heads. It did for me. So here's the word about yokes. Dr. Brand, a surgeon who worked in India among leprosy patients realized that "hundreds of patients had damaged their feet by wearing shoes or sandals that had a tiny rough spot protruding. They couldn't feel the pain but step after step that rough spot ground against the skin and destroyed living tissue. Similarly, the yokes for oxen were designed to keep any such recurrent stress from wearing these animals out. Brand says "I used to make oxen yokes. If I put a flat uncarved piece of wood on an ox's neck and used it to pull a cart, very quickly pressure sores will break out on that animal's neck and he will be useless. A good yoke must be formed to the shape of an ox's neck. It should cover a large area of skin to distribute the stress widely. It should also be smooth, rounded and polished with no sharp edges that would cause pressure sores. Jesus' yoke is like that – When we come to him weary and heavy-laden, He removes those crushing burdens that destroy my soul and replaces them with a yoke fitted just for us so we can walk beside him and to the life work He has created for us, *the good works he has designed for us to do*. (Eph.2:10)." (Dr. Paul Brand with Philip Yancey, Leadership, Vol. 4, no.3).

How do you think the disciples experienced Jesus' yoke? I think they persevered with Him through His presence, His power, His prayers for them, His sustaining grace and His keeping of them while He was still on earth (John 17:). He did that for them before his crucifixion and then more powerfully after the Spirit came to indwell them and empower them.

I believe their models can really inspire and challenge us. They are very relevant for all we face. The new sermon series: "Life from the other side, a look at how the disciples experienced following Jesus." Let's walk beside them and grow together as the Lord's disciples.

Let us pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 9/23/18