

Correcting Your Vision

Seeing Reality:

John 8:31-38

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My uncle's hair was so bright and white, it looked like a halo and made him easily identifiable. His oldest daughter was about 22 or 23 when she spotted him walking ahead of her in a Dayton's store. She snuck up behind him and gave him the biggest whack that this petite blonde could muster. If people had heard the smack in this day, they may have dove under the racks and counters. When the man turned around, it wasn't my uncle. My cousin looked like a fire engine with gold locks.

One man's sting and my cousin's embarrassment resulted from misreading reality. Last week, we considered less humorous examples. We found that crucial facts can be hidden from our senses, such as the contents in backpacks that four men carried into London's mass transit system. We discussed the nature of truth and reality. We considered how difficult it is to grasp reality because much of the essential facts are beyond our field of vision, like icebergs. The average iceberg has four-fifths of its bulk submerged below the surface. Our world is much like an iceberg since reality was created by an unseen God. The suggestion that we can fully grasp reality through some humanly devised method of observation is both naïve and arrogant.

Jesus came to help us grasp reality. He taught that truth is moral. Its grasp brings blessing. Its absence brings destruction. He taught that truth is militant. It displaces malevolent lie. We choose sides with truth. There is no neutral position. Jesus taught that truth is magnificent. It liberates people from deception and reveals why heaven sings.

Today, we consider how to overcome impediments that interfere with our grasp of reality and life. Let's consider our struggle that is revealed in the 8th chapter of John.

I puzzled over this passage because in verse 31 Jesus addressed people who believed him, and in verse 59 those people pick up stones to kill him. Why would people, who believed Jesus, try to kill him? Was I misidentifying who picked up rocks? The passage's dialogue, arguments and logic reveal that the ones who believed were the very ones who turned on him. Their radical turn reveals both the nature of truth and our difficulty in grasping it. It explains why churches founded in love can quickly brutalize one another. It explains why a marriage so beautiful can quickly go sour. It explains why a preschool companion can become an adolescent enemy. It explains why a successful team can quickly disintegrate. It explains why Jesus affirms Peter as having insight from God in Matthew 16:16-19 and why he turns around and rebukes Peter as the voice of Satan in the following verses, Matthew 16:20-23.

Jesus told these new believers that it was not good enough to assent to his teaching. They must walk in it. Then they would be set free. That offended them. They didn't think they were slaves. They were descendents of Abraham. They didn't see below the surface of their religious devotion to what was shaping them. They didn't see how their grasp on reality was viciously opposed. They didn't know that their destructive behavior was because their thoughts and actions were masterminded by the enemy of the one they confessed as God. Listen to Jesus:

Everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free. (John 8:34-37, NLT)

Jesus suggested that these descendents of Abraham were held captive as slaves in a family from which they could be freed. If you are sinning, someone's sewing deception in you and holding you in it. You are serving the purposes of a family in creation as a slave, not a son;

and you can be liberated from this household. Jesus went on to confront these believers with their complicity in a plot to kill him. Jesus pointed to the source. He said:

I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. But you are following the advice of your father. (John 8:38, NLT)

Rather than examining the thinking of their associates and themselves, the believers considered the righteousness of their religious practices and their association with Abraham.

They argued that they were children of Abraham. Jesus responded:

If you were children of Abraham, you would follow his good example... but you are trying to kill me. Abraham wouldn't do a thing like that. No, you are obeying your real father when you act that way. (John 8:39-41, NLT)

Devout people, who believed Jesus, were caught because of their friendly association with their leaders who hated Jesus. They wouldn't say, "Yes, you are right. We've been wrong. Please forgive what we and our leaders have done." They wouldn't say, "We clearly see that the animosity against you is sinful, and we will have no part with it." Instead, they angrily defended themselves, declaring that God was their Father. Jesus got right to the point:

If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but he sent me. Why can't you understand what I am saying? It is because you are unable to do so! For you are the children of your father the Devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning and has always hated the truth. There is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. So when I tell the truth, you just naturally don't believe me! Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin? And since I am telling you the truth, why don't you believe me? Anyone whose Father is God listens gladly to the words of God. Since you don't, it proves you aren't God's children. (John 8:42-47, NLT)

Jesus made the point. Our behavior that is destructive comes from the manipulative influence of the dark angel that subverted Adam and Evil. We need to be freed from his web of deception. If we are free, we will listen to God and recognize his visitation. If we are under his

influence, we'll continue in the deception and destruction, no matter how religious, devout or moral we think we are.

It is interesting that the devil used pride as the major hook to bait Adam and Eve into sinning against God. "You'll be like God in your knowledge," tempted Satan. With this group, who gathered around Jesus at the temple because they now believed him, Satan used pride in their religious devotion to harden their hearts when they were confronted with their sin. Moreover, Satan attacked them as a group.

That is part of the difficulty. Satan does not speak with just one voice. Eve was tempted by a serpent outside herself. Adam then was tempted through Eve's voice. Since their sin, we have been tempted by thoughts within and voices without. Jesus discerned that evil presence with Peter and rebuked Satan at work in him. We face this same attack on truth and reality in nearly every social setting. Our friends, families, schools and society provide helpful glimpses of reality; yet at the same time, sin infecting them obliterates essential aspects of reality and perpetuates deception and suffering for generations. The Apostle Paul writing Titus singled out the destructive teaching of a Jewish Christian born in Crete. He noted how negative influences in Cretan society affected him. Even as Jesus confronts us with the fact of deception and its personal nature, the field of destruction is not private. It is societal. Even as we are blessed because we are Americans, we suffer hindrances to reality precisely because we are Americans. Even as we are blessed because we are educated, we suffer hindrances to reality because of the sins of those by whom and with whom we were educated. Even as we are blessed because we are Christians that God is forming in the United Methodist Church, we suffer hindrances to reality exactly because of that. That goes for Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Evangelicals,

Charismatics, and Independents. As soon as Satan presses the pride button in us, we shut off God's communication of truth.

That is exactly why Jesus didn't just greet his newest Jewish believers in the temple with a big welcome. He exhorted them:

If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (John 8:31-32, NASU)

They liked what Jesus said. Many of us do too. But how far will we go with Jesus. Will we adopt his perspective on the world? Will we receive all of his word? Will we implement it when the going gets tough, and we suffer loss?

When I graduated from college, I took some time off to work in emergency medical services in Minneapolis and St. Paul. For a short time I drove emergency ambulances and attended patients in emergency situations. I remember my first cardiac arrest. I was the experienced crew member that day and took charge. As the minutes ticked away and there was no sign of life, I thought, "I'm doing this patient no good. What's the use? I should give up." However, I continued to do what I had learned in my training. The patient finally revived. I was so thankful that I had continued with the word or teaching that I had received. It was not good enough to simply begin as an Emergency Medical Technician and acknowledge that the teaching was true. I had to continue. I had to persist in the face of discouraging circumstance when all signs suggested the teaching wasn't true. Only then did I discover for myself its validity.

Will we persevere in applying all of Jesus' teaching even when our friends, educators, and society ridicule us? Will Jesus be the bread of life or just a slice in life? Will he be your tutor in all things, or will you only accept part of him? If you only love a slice of him, you don't love him. If you only follow a part of him, you don't follow him. If you only believe some of his teaching, you don't believe him; and truly are opposed to him. What will it be? All or rocks?