

Ezekiel 18:25-32

Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live.

Mark 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

“Seeing is Believing: Or Is It?”**September 28, 2008****Rev. Charles Schuster**

I don't know about you, but there's something about harp music that just kind of mellows you out.

Well, if you were here last week, you got Eugene Lowry, one of the great preachers in our country, a professor of preaching. Did you enjoy Gene? Did you enjoy having him come? Yes? We'll pass that on to him. He preached a couple of times, he played out piano there, and then he got a bunch of ministers, preachers, together on Monday morning, taught us, told us some things we ought to be doing, and I'm really glad you enjoyed it, because I didn't. He's got me all messed up. I find myself talking like he talked, voice goes up like that, and I stutter and stammer around trying to form the word picture, you know, like how he said there was Simon Peter, waltzing into the room with one foot in his mouth, and how he told the story about the Oklahoma farmer in the Depression, sitting on his tractor, rearranging the dust. I think I was under the influence of Eugene this past week when I got a phone call. Somebody from one of the political parties, I don't remember which, and it doesn't really matter. Might have been one of

you, I don't know. They wanted to know how I was going to vote. "Could you tell us, sir, how you're going to vote?" Which is nobody's business, especially an anonymous phone caller, who's probably a Presbyterian, or worse, an Episcopalian, or even a Methodist that got religion. And I said I was voting for Joseph Lieberman. I figured it would tick off the Democrats and confuse the Republicans, and they hung up on me. And I don't think I would have done that if it hadn't been for Eugene Lowry being here preaching sermons like he did.

In the workshop, when he met with the preachers, he told us we ought to be looking in the Bible for things that nobody else sees, and he gave us an example. He said, if you preach a sermon about how Jesus called the disciples when they were fishing, and how he told them to go out and fish, and they didn't catch any fish, and he said "Throw your nets up on the other side" and then they caught more fish, the biggest catch of their lives, and there were so many fish in those nets they had to have help pulling them into the boats, and then they brought the boats in and put them on the shore, and then, the text says, they went off and followed Jesus. He said, "I know what you preachers are going to do, you're going to talk about how good it is to go out and follow Jesus. And that's good. But," he said, "we ought to be concerned about the fact that they left the biggest catch of their lives in the boats and walked away. We ought to ask what happened to the fish. Who got the fish, who cleaned the fish, who ate the fish?"

That's got me all messed up, because that makes me think about such things as when the disciples finished with the Last Supper, did they leave a tip on the table? And I'm beginning to wonder, where was God when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit? You know, stuff like that. So ever since Eugene left, I've been looking for that kind of thing, and it's driving me crazy, I can't sleep at night because of it. I even emailed him and complained about it, and he told me he was glad he did what he did, and he's gone and ruined me. I need therapy.

This morning, we have this story about Jesus and all it says, and I would not have noticed this, "He came to Jericho, and then he left." He came to Jericho, and then he left, and I can hear Eugene telling me, "Chuck, ask the question, why did Jesus come to Jericho, and why didn't he stay very long?" So I've been working on that. I just figured somebody'd want to go to Jericho. Who wouldn't? Jesus went to Jericho to see the miracle of Joshua, and Jesus was transfixed by what he saw. Who wouldn't be? I mean, Jericho was the place where Joshua blew a trumpet and the walls came down, so we're told. Did you ever see a trumpet take down a wall? I have. It was at a wedding once, but that's another sermon.

Two weeks ago at the church, we're cleaning up one of the closets because we're looking for more space. I'm on this cleanup binge. I'm going to clean up everything that we don't need, it's going out of here. I may have to meet with some friends here in the middle of the night to get rid of some of it, but there's stuff that's going out of here, because we've held onto it too long. And we're cleaning up one of the closets, it's one of the ones down the hall that goes south, and we found those walls there, you know, the ones that are sitting in front of the choir. I'd heard that some choir members wanted those walls in

front of them, the people who sit in the front row, so they could have a place to put their hymnals, and it would give them a little protection from the congregation when they sang a bad anthem, so we brought them back. And we got some other walls we could put in front of the preachers, but the preachers are divided on the subject, the vote is three to two, to leave the walls in the closet. Three of your preachers like the congregation to be able to interact with us, and that there be no barrier between us. Two of us would like a place to hide on Sunday morning, and I'm one of them.

Did you ever go see what was left of the wall, that was the wall in Berlin? Some of the people at 8:00 have seen that, I never have, but when that wall came down there was an awakening, the sweet smell of freedom that was a miracle. Did you ever go to Belfast, Northern Ireland, where the walls came down just because a group of mothers got up in the face of the Protestant and Catholic leaders and said "We're tired of y'all killing our children, you need to stop it." Jesus went to Jericho to see where the wall came down, where Joshua took down the wall, to the land of Canaan. It was a miracle, it was a magical place, people were transfixed. Jesus stood and stared and he saw, and seeing is believing, and then he left. It was magic to his eyes, and it was seeing that was believing, and he left. Didn't stay long.

Harold Kushner in his book *Who Needs God?* tells it straight and tells it right. He said, "Religion is not primarily a set of beliefs, a collection of prayers, a series of rituals. Religion is first and foremost a way of seeing." It can't change the facts about the world we live in, but it can go a long way to help us see those facts in a different way, and that in itself can make a difference.

I'm convinced that the very first creed of the church, when the disciples formed a church, the very first statement of faith, ever, it wasn't "Jesus is Lord." It wasn't something about the Trinity, it wasn't about the virgin birth, it was from those women at the tomb and the disciples who followed them. It was a statement that began with seeing. They were transfixed. They stood amazed, and told anyone who would listen, and everyone who was nearby, they said it, "He's not there. That tomb's empty." It's a living Christ, not a crucified savior. Seeing is believing. Jesus came to Jericho to see a wall that Joshua knocked down with his trumpet, and seeing was believing for him. I can imagine that got Jesus thinking about walls, and how God can knock some of them down, the miracle of Jericho. If a trumpet can take out a wall, maybe we don't have to have walls. If a trumpet can take down a wall, maybe God can do other things, like turn water into wine or bring the kingdom of God through a child, or make a sacrament out of a meal. Seeing is believing.

Wayne Dyer wrote a book. The title of the book is *Inspiration*. Now, the inspiration for the book is even better than the book. The inspiration for the book is a butterfly, and a friend, Jack Boland. Jack Boland's a preacher, a friend of Wayne Dyer. Jack was always talking about the monarch butterfly, you know how it'll fly thousands of miles back to the same tree and the same branch where it began its life as a cocoon. And Jack died ten years ago, and one day a monarch butterfly landed in front of Wayne Dyer, he was writing his book. The butterfly took off, made a u-turn, and landed on his hand, and then

flew up onto his shoulder, and then landed on his other hand, and it seemed to be moving its mouth, that is, the butterfly, in such a way that it was trying to communicate with Wayne. It stayed with him for ninety minutes. Butterflies don't do that. It made him think of Jack. And the book *Inspiration*, the cover of that book, if you ever buy it, it's got a picture of that butterfly, because he took a picture of it, so we could see it, so we could believe it. Seeing is believing, but we've got to look.

You've got to look into the faces of the people at the grocery store, now. For some of them, they have more month than they have money. But if you look you can see the courage in their eyes to make it through the night. We have to look past the headlines that tell us of financial meltdown to know the human spirit won't wilt, and the love of God will never melt. It's money, it's a means, not an end. Seeing is believing. Miracles abound, but we have to look, and when we see, we are transfixed, and we move on, like Jesus, who didn't stay in Jericho very long.

Eugene would want me to ponder why Jesus came to Jericho and then he left. Seeing is believing, Jesus was transfixed. And then there's another part of the story Eugene, I think, would want me to notice and point out to your today. This blind man whose name was Bart, son of Timaeus, Eugene would have me ask, on your behalf, when a person is blind from birth and suddenly sees light, does the person suddenly see? Jesus opened Bart's eyes, but Bart had never seen before. It takes time, when you're sightless, to see. But this man believed, and he followed, because he saw with his heart. Jesus walked past him. Bart knew who he was, called him out. "Jesus, son of David." The others around there told him to shut up. Jesus opened his eyes. Bart, son of Timaeus, followed him. But Bart saw with his heart, and he believed. Believing with the heart is seeing. He was transformed. Believing is seeing, but first, you've got to trust. What we believe determines what we see.

A mother told a story. "I was driving," she said, "with my three young children. It was a warm summer evening, when a woman in a convertible ahead of us stood up and waved. She was naked, and I was appalled and shocked, and then my five-year-old son shouted from the back seat, "Hey Mom, that lady, she's not wearing her seat belt." Believing that safety is most important determines what a five-year-old is able to see. Believing is seeing.

I love this story, I don't know if it's true. It happened in a worship service on a Sunday morning. The church organ had a computer in it, and the organist, for some portions of the service, could push a button and the organ would play something that was needed, like the Doxology. You know the Doxology, that's what we play after we've received the offering. The offering is taken up, we're singing the Doxology, you know, the ushers are coming forward to put the plates on the communion table, the altar, it's a beautiful thing. This was the case with this little church. The ushers were coming back down the aisle, two great big men, each with a couple of offering plates, and the organist pushed the button to play the Doxology. Two big male ushers, the organ set for the day before began to play the Wedding March. The organist got the music stopped while the congregation was in hysterics. Believing was seeing, and one of the ushers,

holding an offering plate in a moment of relative silence said in a voice loud enough for all to hear, "I do." And that congregation still talks about the Sunday morning when the Wedding March transformed worship. Seeing is believing, but believing is seeing, and that is transforming that we have to trust.

Jane Wagner wrote a book entitled *My Life So Far*, and in that book there is believing that leads to seeing. She writes, "Every moment is a moment that has a chance of becoming one of those moments we will never forget." That's believing, that leads to seeing, and that seeing leads to transformation, and that can last a lifetime. There's a sportswriter, a sportscaster names Jerry Schemmel. He was on a flight to Chicago, and then to Columbus, Ohio. He flew standby. He was the last passenger to get on. It was United Flight 232. Never made it to Chicago, crashed in Sioux City, Iowa. It's in his book *Chosen to Live*. A hundred and twelve died. One of those who died, I conducted her funeral service.

Another passenger on the plane who survived, is a member of our church, Martha Conant. Martha was the first one to respond when she read on the web page how the sermon was developing this week. You know enough about Martha, she approaches life from the perspective of a mystic who understands the power of belief, and she is the driving force behind the adult program, one of the best adult programs anywhere I've ever seen. That pushes all of us to new levels of belief. Jerry Schemmel is a sportscaster. Listen to his story. He survived physically, but as a survivor, he was dying. He was dying of guilt and trauma. He was dying of depression. He thought it might help if he went back to that cornfield. He had to see it, so he collected some of the dirt and put it in a bag. Seeing it, he hoped it would help. And it did. Seeing was believing, but it didn't last. One day, ten months after the crash, in a dark light of a bedroom, sitting in a chair, at an emotional and spiritual low, because of something Diane, his wife said, he came to believe that the rhyme added to the reason, that the solution applied to the mystery. Chosen to live, for whatever reason, for whatever beyond reason, I give my life to God, believing there's more for me to do. Believing there's something beyond survival. Believing there's purpose, no matter what. He believed it was time for him to live beyond himself, for the God who was with him and the Christ who was with him, and for the future that called him. Believing is seeing. It takes trust that things are solid, even when the earth is quaking, and trust that we can do what we must, even when we're not sure what that is, and trust to look past the dark days to see God's abundance.

We have a rebuilt parking lot. The reason we have it, a church member, Bernie Toms, came to the church one day with a check, and she said, "I believe in the leaders of this church. You want to pay down the debt, pay it down. But I want to see what you'll do with fifty thousand dollars, so here, take it." She believed in the church, and now she can see what she's done. Mike Nelson will come and speak to us. A meteorologist for Channel Seven, he's the author of a book, *Colorado Weather Almanac*. He believes, listen to what he sees. "Everyone who lives in this beautiful state, everyone is lucky. So many days of lovely sunshine, such a great variety of clouds, brilliant colors throughout the seasons, the changes are fast, the intensity of our seasons all combines to make Colorado an especially wondrous place to watch the skies." You hear it in his voice?

There's believing, believing that the world is a beautiful place, no matter what. Believing this is one of the most beautiful places of all. Believing that leads to seeing. Like Bart, son of Timaeus, who was blind when he sat on the road and called out to Jesus and was still blind when he got up and followed Jesus, but he could see with his heart, and he could trust where he was being led, and believing was seeing, and he was transformed for life.

Eugene Lowry knew it, if we trust in God's future, we can entrust the future into God's hands. And if we look for the moments and the miracles, we will see walls come down, like the one in Jericho. Seeing is believing, but we've got to look. Believing is seeing, but we've got to trust. Eugene Lowry would have wanted me to tell you all about that today, and then he would have wanted me to sit down when I finished, and so I will.