

Reframing Reality

Matthew 8:23-27

I don't know about you, but I seem to get a better start to my day when I don't turn on the morning news and read the headlines before I head out to work. My habit, for a long time now, is to watch a couple of morning shows. One that talks about political happenings and one that focuses in on the financial world. I think maybe I need to switch to Sesame Street and sing along with Big Bird and the crew. Maybe I ought to cut back on my venti coffee from Starbucks as well.

In many ways we pretty much set ourselves up for how our day will go. If we approach it with high expectations and a positive attitude, more than likely we will have a good day. If we drag ourselves out of bed and dread another day of bad news and unfulfilling work, well, you will more than likely get just what you expect. For the most part I am a glass half full kind of person. But Barb can testify that when I become a glass half empty kind of guy, I am no fun to be around. I have come to believe that it takes far more energy to get through the day as a glass half empty person than it does for one that sees the world for the possibilities in it.

Several years ago Barb's and my friend, songwriter Don Schlitz, wrote a song about a little boy who saw himself as a great baseball hitter. Kenny Rogers recorded the song and it received some airplay. Certainly not as successful as the first time Don and Kenny got together on a little song called "The Gambler", but a fun song nonetheless. If you aren't familiar with "The Greatest" take a look at the screens this morning for the music video that went with it. (play video)

Don has written a lot of great songs over the years, but this is one of those that is near the top of his favorites. Don is a half empty glass kind of guy, so for those of us who know him, this is a song that is somewhat unexpected. It is a song about reframing your reality. Obviously the little boy, at least at this point in his life, is not the greatest hitter ever, but by the end of the song he has now shifted his focus upon being the greatest pitcher. Same boy...same simple throwing up of the ball...but a new reality: at least in his mind. You have to love it!

At some point in our lives many of us have to decide whether we will be a realist with a positive outlook or a realist with a negative perspective. If you believe that even with as bad as it gets that there is a silver lining, you will find it. If you believe that it is really bad and will probably get worse, it will. When we set our hearts and minds on what we expect to see in the world, we will somehow dismiss all of those things that don't fit our reality, and magnify those that do.

When you look at Jesus and his disciples you find the classic examples of reframing reality. Even when he was most exhausted, Jesus could somehow make the best of the situation. This morning's scripture reminds us that Jesus was always answering the demands of the people around him. In the Matthew account of Jesus calming the water we find that he is travelling in the boat to get away from the growing crowds on one side of the lake. He has been teaching and healing and is worn out. But even in his exhausted state he maintains his balance and is ready to once again go to work when he hits the other shore. He may have had his moments when he was a little testy (calming the storm, turning over the money changers tables) but for the most part he was on his game and ready to respond.

Those around him did not have that same sense of calm. They had a hard time seeing beyond all of those things that could go wrong. Many of them operated right on the edge of panic because they saw only the bad at every turn. When Jesus was ministering in the crowd they worried about who might get to him. When he chose to feed the masses, they were convinced that it would be a total disaster. After travelling with him for 3 years of their lives they still had trouble finding the grace in the moment as they could only see the impending problems on the horizon.

Last week I was with some of the most gifted and talented ministers our denomination has. These are the people serving some of our historic large churches and many of them are doing quite well. When you have a chance to sit one on one with most of these people you find that they are horizon kinds of people. They know that there are problems and pitfalls in their appointed ministries, but each also sees the potential for greatness in their church. Even with the people who have been through really difficult times in the ministry, they still

see God working great things in places they serve. These are glass half full people.

Now you may think that in this kind of gathering everyone is simply trying to put the best spin on their current placement. That surely could be true. But I really think that the people in the room that I met were people who could see beyond the problems to the possibilities at hand. And this ability, to deal with reality but to also see the possibilities, kept them from getting bogged down in the mire of bad news and able to focus on the good. This is not a rosy colored glass approach that denies the downside, but a realist approach that chooses to see the opportunity at hand and not the opportunity lost.

Too many churches today are in the survival mode. This mode sees the church dying and all of the energy and all of the work of the church come out of the fear of that happening. In this kind of perceived reality everything new is seen as a possibly cause for the death of the church. You don't take any risks because any failure could push the church over the brink. This is a tough place to do productive and faithful work. When the driving force is to protect what you have rather than to take the risk for what you can become, the life drains out of the church. A large percentage of churches find themselves in this place and they are fulfilling their greatest fear...the death of their church. They are unable to reframe their reality and see that change is the only way to move forward, and maintaining is a recipe for further loss.

One of the great tragedies in life is when we think that in doing the same thing over and over again the results will be different. Churches get stuck in this mode all the time and they pay a price for it. So do families and so do individuals. Somehow we have to find the courage and the energy to break the cycle or we will simply continue to spin further and further down the hole.

The disciples could only see the trouble around them and ahead of them. Jesus ministered in the present and kept looking forward to what God was planning for him. Tragically it took his death and resurrection before those around him were willing to see his truth and begin to take the risks necessary for the church to thrive.

When we reframe our reality then all of life takes on a different look. It is like the blinders being removed and the whole landscape

comes into view. In reframing we risk seeing the world for what it can be and become open to finding a new role in it.

I have always found it amazing that God can see all of this before we do, and when the church is ready and willing to reframe its reality, most of the time God has already placed the necessary gifts among us to make that new reality work. I believe that has happened and is currently happening here at Southport. As we begin to risk seeing the glass half full, then we will also begin to see how God will keep filling it again and again as long as we need it.

Let me close with one more baseball reference this morning. A man was driving by a little league baseball park on a beautiful afternoon. He had some time to burn between appointments so he parked and walked to the outside of the center field fence where he watched for a little while. The team in the field was getting beat badly. The fielders were constantly running to the fence to retrieve a ball and throw it back into the infield. After this had gone on for some time and the team at bat was still getting run after run the man asked the boy playing center field "What's the score?" The boy responded "18-0" to which the man responded "I'll bet you're discouraged!"

The little boy replied immediately, "Why should I be discouraged? We haven't even gotten up to bat?"

Reframing reality. No reason to get discouraged until you get your time at bat. The time to bat is now Southport. How will we respond?