

When speaking about the authority and interpretation of scriptures, there is an old adage: "The bible is absolutely true, and some of the events may have happened." This is especially true about the stories in the gospel of John. We can't read a word of John without remembering these stories were collected for a slumping Jewish Christian community, near the end of the first century, or beginning of the second. They are besieged and persecuted at every turn. They have been expelled from the synagogues. And they are threatening to abandon the way of Jesus.

The gospel of John is mostly metaphor. It is peppered with a deeply incarnational theology ("the spirit of God is within you) and the stories are intended to help people re-consider the Jesus events from a new perspective ("Greater things than these shall you do in my name"). The theology of the Jesus IS deeply buried in their Jewish roots: the way of Jesus is counter cultural and leads to persecution, but it also leads to life. ("I came that they may life and have it abundantly."

The stories in John put words into Jesus mouth "I am the true vine. I am the bread of life. I am the great shepherd." Today we hear "I came for the purpose of justice. While I'm in the world, I am the light of the world."

Did Jesus really say these things? Was there a man born blind who received his sight? Did the Pharisees bounce back and forth asking the witnesses about the truth of the man's story?

Or are the John stories really giving witness to the light that came into a dark world. Remember, these stories were collected as metaphor. The key to this story lies in Jesus' response to the disciples: 'The point is not who is to blame for this man's blindness, the point is how does God's spirit work in those who choose to trust.' That's how I interpret those opening lines. Alan Jones wrote: "The converted life (the life where we gain our sight) is based on trusting the immediate relationship we have with God, since a human is, by definition, the place where God chooses to dwell."

The story really speaks for itself doesn't it. There is a keystone cops kind of interrogation, with the Pharisees running from pillar to post trying to fit this story into their own paradigm. But the riveting thing about this divine God is that there's no such limitation. This divine healing spirit will not be boxed into this paradigm, or any other paradigm. The tyranny of the one right way is completely inconsistent with the way of Jesus.

In abject trust, the man let Jesus put mud on his eyes. Ever wonder the origin of the expression “here’s mud in your eye”? He follows Jesus’ instruction to wade into the waters of “being sent.” Siloam. (What might that mean, friends, on our journey to wellness – to wade into the waters of being sent by Jesus...at his request?) And the man returns seeing what he could not see before. “Here’s an astonishing thing,” said the man. “You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of person born blind.”

I have a friend who used to say regularly: “don’t always believe the words. Consider the evidence.” Every one of the players in this story back tracked. They used words to slide out of a sticky situation because they were fearful. The Pharisees were trying to trick people, catch them in violation of the law – Jesus healed on the Sabbath...the rules say he cannot do that and be considered a teacher/leader in the way of the Pharisees. He simply cannot possibly be a man of God through the lens of their paradigm.

And the man simply says ‘here’s an astonishing thing; consider the evidence.’

The funniest line from the whole story comes after Jesus says “I came into this world for justice so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see, may become blind.”

The Pharisees seem indignant “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Ahhh?

Now before we’re too hard on the Pharisees – I truly believe Jesus loves these people. They are his people. He has been taught by them in the synagogues of his growing up. From what we discovered last week, his teaching is not new to the Jewish tradition; his is a new way of seeing the tradition. Remember how Jesus said to Nicodemus last week “You are a teacher of Israel and you don’t know these things.”

So before we’re too hard on the Pharisees...let’s ask ourselves the very same question as we consider some of the new ways of seeing our own tradition. “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Think of those moments in your life when you were absolutely positive that you were right and discovered – woops, I might be mistaken. Think of the great paradigms in science that have been overturned by cataclysmic new information: the world is flat; the universe revolves around the earth. Think of what we believed about ourselves. This congregation cannot possibly raise \$250,000 to support programs over two years, or find lenders to offer another \$170,000, to support two full time ministers. The Sunday morning experience is the only way to be church. The Marcus Mosely Chorale wouldn’t ever sing here?

“One thing we do know, that though once we were blind, we now see.” There is no judgment in this statement. There is only one response: for this, thanks be to God. Amen.