

How Wide Is Your Worldview?

Acts 9: 1-19

We have so very much in common with one another. We have all been 5 years old, we have all been 7. (Sorry to exclude the one person in the room who has not yet been 5.) But of course, we are all so completely different. When we were all 5 - we were all in a different place than the other. And one of the earliest qualities of the followers of Jesus was that they wanted to be united with people who were completely different from themselves. It wasn't easy and it took a lot of tries.

One of the most famous stories of this is of Jesus wanting to speak with children and his disciples being a little worried because children aren't exactly like us are they? Jesus, of course, said, "let them come unto me." The followers of Jesus though always felt that one of their calls was to be in this world in a way that included all, that allowed differences to be celebrated, not erased; all this and to follow Jesus who had a way about him that said that love could surpass even death, even hate.

In this morning's scripture we hear two people who are both quite set in their ways. Saul was in his twenties and up until this moment he had been struggling hard like we all do to live in right relationship with God and to become successful. He did this by doing what his teachers and leaders and parents had taught him. He became excellent at an art called debate. He also became part of a movement that persecuted "those people: who are watering down our faith: those followers of Jesus. At the time, they were called 'Followers of the Way.'

And of course he is met by Ananias, a man who is also very set in his ways; though for us these ways are a bit easier to understand. He is afraid of going to meet a man who arrests followers of Jesus. And God says: "Go and meet him," and Ananias says, "Have you heard the news? This isn't exactly the guy you go and have lunch with." Both of these people are asked to change how big the love of God is in their mind.

Two of the movies from the Oscar nominated movies this year were definitely, for me, experiences in being asked to walk in another's shoes (as someone said). It is a great way to change one's attitude and it is not always easy.

A movie called 'Call Me by My Name' (whose title I won't explain, for you might want to just see it yourself) is a love story. And I have to admit I don't often watch love stories. There is an

angst watching someone fall in love. They are unsure if they're doing it right, unsure if it will be reciprocated with love, trying to look cool while completely falling apart every time he or she walks by. I have felt like that. I remember very clearly the first time I felt like that. I still remember the name of the person who would walk by in the hall and I would fall apart ... while totally looking cool. I remember the angst of finding out he might like me, the angst of deciding I actually didn't like him (once I actually got to know him). These are the kinds of things that happen in our lives and they are wondrous and joyful and angst filled. Watching this movie was like watching a moving piece of art; its music, its pace, everything says, "come in. Come in and remember how wondrously horrible love is, how it will make you hurt and laugh and cry."

It helped me read the story of Ananias differently too. Because when I read the story of Paul I want to focus on Paul's conversion, the "saw a big light" story. The story that has a beginning middle and end as well. But I am so much more like Ananias; I am going about my ministry. I know the people I am supposed call to be a part of this ministry and then every once in a while God says, "Yeah, I need you to look wider. There is a child of God just outside your view."

Another movie that came out this year was called 'Get Out.' It also is a difficult movie to watch and not a movie I would recommend to just anyone. Unlike what the 'Golden Globe' selection committee thought, it is *not* a comedy. Though there are moments of deep grinning, it's not a guffaw. And what it does is a little different from the other movie because it asks me to walk in the shoes of someone who is very different from me. Someone with who other than a few things (like finding out that your phone didn't charge overnight like it was supposed to and getting frustrated) I don't have a lot in common. He was raised as an African American in the United States; he's a photographer, an artist who sees things very, very specifically and differently than I do. He has lived his entire life being a minority in his world and has fallen in love with a Caucasian woman, which surprises him more than it surprises her.

In this tale we meet a family. A family that is so rich and so naturally intelligent that they have been able to create for themselves a bubble. They have been able to purchase a home that has enough land around it that you can't find it easily on a map. They have connected with others, who are also rich and very intelligent. They're doctors, nurses, lawyers and they live an unrealistic lifestyle. Now part of that lifestyle is because they are part of the "one percent." They have the freedom to do whatever they wish due to their status and money. But of course this is also a movie so there is another aspect of their life that is very, hopefully, unrealistic and frightening.

Without giving away any spoilers I will tell you this, this story uses their active racism as a hyperbole and a metaphor to help me walk in this young man's shoes for a while as he gets to know them, as he becomes horrified at what he sees. It takes a horror movie, these exaggerated hyperboles of racism to help me get even a glimpse of what it is like to be a minority because it is not an experience that I personally have ever needed to have. And about half way through or even before that I said to myself, "well this is unrealistic."

Now part of it is unrealistic -again it's a movie, it's exaggerated, it's hyperbole- but all of a sudden I became aware that I wasn't thinking that THAT part of it was unrealistic. I was thinking the basic, everyday racism was unbelievable. Because I wanted it to be unbelievable. I wanted it to never have existed ever. And so this screenwriter has this gift of making me walk in these shoes and get very uncomfortable and ask myself in what ways am I racist, in what ways am I limiting God's love for others in my imagination.

One of the beautiful metaphors of this story is that it uses the power of hypnotism on its characters. One of its characters is a gifted hypnotist and I "woke up" at the end of the movie and thought, 'Oh my, where have I been hypnotized?' by my safety, my status, my freedoms, and privileges to just stay asleep to these worlds of experience.

I remember the miracle that happened to and with Saul. Saul had been persecuting to the death followers of Jesus, sure that they were going to absolutely ruin not only his faith, but his religious tradition. He perceived that the very legacy of the Jewish people was in peril. Then he had a profound mystical experience that said, "Paul, Saul why so much hate? Why are you spending so much time asleep? Wake up, I am here and I am not ruining anything." And Paul cannot see for three days he is so changed by the love of Christ.

Sometimes it takes a horror movie to wake us up. Sometimes it takes a piece of art to break our hearts back open. I pray that as we continue to minister to God's world we remember that being broken open is a gift, for it not only allows us to see wider, but it allows more of God's love to come in. May God break our hearts open this week.

Amen