

Everybody is talking about the man, but no one really cares about him. Or celebrates with him. No one asks him what it's like to see the cascade of foamy waves settling onto the shore for the first time. No one stands alongside him and is mesmerized as he gazes at the pink buds sprouting from earth. Sure, they've all got questions for him, but only in so far as they confirm or refute what they've always believed or assumed about God, humanity, and human utility.

To the disciples, this man is less a human being and more of an object lesson. They ask Jesus: *“Can you tell us who is at fault for this man to have been born blind? Bad things aren't supposed to happen to good people, so someone must have done something wrong. Right, Jesus?”*

To his neighbors the man is surely a mirage of some sort. *“Is this the same man who used to beg for money outside of the temple?”* they ask. *“People can't change just like that, can they?”*

When all of those respected temple leaders finally see the man, it seems that all they can surmise about him is that he's misguided, recalcitrant, and a heretic's newest groupie. *“Young man,”* they pointedly say, *“how exactly did this so-called Messiah give you the ability to see? We all know that if he was the true Messiah he would not be working on the Sabbath. To do so would be to break God's law. Something blasphemous is going on here, and it must be stopped!”*

“Chill out,” we might want to say. Deep down though, we get their reactions. When life throws us a curveball we, too, start looking at everyone with a suspicious glance, certain someone is out to get us. When the inexplicable happens we grapple for answers or someone or something to blame.

Years ago, when my otherwise healthy yoga instructor was diagnosed with a terminal illness, we all begin asking questions. How could someone who practiced meditation, grew her own vegetables, ate perfect portions of fish and lean meats, swam everyday, and had a house overflowing with books still fall prey to such an insidious disease? What went wrong? Man, if this happened to her, could it happen to us?

When the most recent attempt at health care reform fell flat two days ago the talking heads had a field day. Is the President in over his head and not as skilled a negotiator as he claimed? Were factions of the Republican Party too obstinate in defeating the ACA that they threw out portions of the program that had benefited tens of thousands of people? Were the Democrats too unwilling to compromise in the name of political victory?

Oh, and how about the woman standing in the median at the intersection—the who shakes her paper cup and asks if we can spare some change? What did she do to get there? Is she abusing illegal substances or suffering from an undiagnosed psychiatric illness? Maybe she's lazy, hmmm.

What if—as I believe—the fault or explanation we're looking for is not with the woman on the corner or the yoga instructor or the people on Capitol Hill alone or the man without sight? What if the true source of discord lay in the questions instead?

What if instead of asking Jesus who sinned, the disciples were honest about their fear and struggle to reconcile sickness and suffering with a God of love and mercy? What if they admitted they maybe there is more to truth than tradition had taught up to this point?

What if the man's neighbors could ask themselves why they had only come to know him by his disability and not anything else? What if they considered that there is more to life than mere meritocracy?

And just imagine the different responses that could emerge if the Pharisees could suspend their expectations that the Messiah had to be a mighty warrior and ask why they limited salvation to a political victory alone? What if they dared to ask how Scripture could be fulfilled in this day? What if they asked themselves what is so frightening about the work of Jesus? What if everyone the man met that day had the humility and courage to honestly admit they have it wrong—even in their questions? What if we did the same as the people of God? Personally and globally. To be the Church as God calls us to be we have to be the first to admit that maybe we have gotten it wrong or that's it time to try again, because time and time again, the Church has indeed suffered from its own kind of blindness.

The truth of the matter is that as long as there are people in the richest nation in the world fretting over whether to get the 8 oz. grass-fed ribeye or the wild-caught Alaskan King Salmon for dinner while more than **half** our brothers and sisters must decide between buying groceries, paying rent, or paying for their kids' asthma inhaler then we've missed the mark. *We all need to ask better questions until we have a better answer.*

So, why not instead of questioning the situation of the woman on the corner we might ask ourselves what causes us to avoid eye contact or pass judgment? As Pope Francis said, we may say to ourselves, "I give money and then [s]he spends it on drinking a glass of wine... but if a glass of wine is the only happiness he has in life, that's OK. Instead, ask yourself what do you do on the sly? What 'happiness' do you seek in secret?"<sup>1</sup> We all have our vices, we just happen to be able to do them at home in cleaner conditions.

St. Augustine, the revered bishop of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, was on to something when he said: "Fallo ergo sum. I err therefore I am."<sup>2</sup> That's not a judgement, my friends. That's what it means to let God be God and ourselves be dependent, humble, hopeful, grateful, and redeemed. That's what it means to be able to say, "God, I just don't know, and I'm scared...

I don't know why he's so sick...

I don't know why I can't catch a break...

I don't know why...

But Lord, I'm gonna trust you. For you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Even in trial, your presence is with me in the face of my enemies.

Friends, Jesus doesn't need or want your perfection or certainty. He wants your dependence, your wonder, your gratitude...*you*. When we stop for a moment or many moments and get our heads out of the sand long enough to really pay attention, we can see that grace has been and is the air we breathe. We'll never explain it, justify it, or quantify it, but we might be able to experience the wonder of standing alongside the man as he experiences color and light for the first time or walk through our own dark nights knowing God is with us.<sup>3</sup>

Let us be the people of God who show the world what it means to embrace humility and grace even when it's not popular to do so. Jesus was never on the side of popular or right.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis quoted in Carol Glatz, "Don't Worry How It's Spent," *Catholic News Service*, February 28, 2017, <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2017/dont-worry-how-its-spent-always-give-homeless-a-handout-pope-says.cfm>, accessed March 26, 2017

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo quoted in Kathryn Schulz, "On Being Wrong," *TED*, March 2011, [http://www.ted.com/talks/kathryn\\_schulz\\_on\\_being\\_wrong?utm\\_source=newsletter\\_weekly\\_2011-05-03&utm\\_campaign=newsletter\\_weekly&utm\\_medium=email#t-95112](http://www.ted.com/talks/kathryn_schulz_on_being_wrong?utm_source=newsletter_weekly_2011-05-03&utm_campaign=newsletter_weekly&utm_medium=email#t-95112), accessed March 18, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Karoline M. Lewis, "Dear Preaching: On Being Found," *Working Preacher*, March 19, 2017, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4843>, accessed March 24, 2017.

He was on the side of justice, love, and mercy. Let love be the language on our lips and the blood flowing through our veins.

Yes, it's true that St. Augustine nailed it when he said: "Fallo ergo sum. I err therefore I am."

Even still, I think he left off the best part of being human:  
"Hoc enim fallimur, amantur et dimittetur ei. Nos liberi sumus."  
We err. Therefore we are loved and forgiven. We are free.

...Any questions?

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