

<Job 38:1-7; Psalm 105:1-9, 24; Mark 10:35-45>

*Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Holy One, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.*

"Everything I had thought was wrong. Everything I expected to see was wrong."

William Shatner could be considered the quintessential face of space exploration and going to the edges of what is known to see what is out there, to "boldly go where no one has gone before." From three years and almost eighty episodes, to say nothing of numerous movies and guest appearances, Shatner's character of James T. Kirk, Captain of the Starship Enterprise, has become synonymous with space exploration.

So when William Shatner was set to go to outer space, leaving the Earth's atmosphere aboard a Blue Origin vessel, many of us - including Shatner himself - saw it as a natural next step. He was going to be able to do what few actors had ever been able to do: to experience the milieu in real life of what he portrayed so often on the screen. The expectation was that everything he had imagined about space, everything he dreamed and envisioned about the experience of being in space, would be verified and made real. No one, including himself, saw coming the actual experience, that instead of finding space to be the great invitation into an expanse of life and possibility, that he would look out and see...nothing. An emptiness that was more vast than he possibly could have comprehended. In response to his imagined engagement with the mystery of space, he reflected, "there was no mystery, no majestic awe to behold...all I saw was death."

Most of us live our daily lives in what Ron Heifetz, leadership development coach, would call the "dance-floor view." And that's not a critique, just a recognition. But he posits that, for the most part, we move through our daily lives focused on what's immediate, what's right in front of us, what we're doing and how that's affected by what other people are doing. He likens it to a large group of people in a dance hall - everyone hears the same music, and joins in the dance, but each participant is focused only on their own movements, and is really only aware of what is immediately around them in their own sphere. All that is known from the dance-floor view is what can be seen right where you are.

Or to use another metaphor, it's like being unable to see the forest for all the trees, though that one's a bit more critical. According to Heifetz, recognizing that one is seeing the world through the perspective of the dance-floor is not a negative, it's just a recognition. But forming our understanding from this view alone can lead us to some less-than-comprehensive perspectives, or to a view that is not encompassing all that it should. We become mis-aligned, then, with the greater calling, the greater reality. This was the case with William Shatner; all his life he held an understanding of space based on his acting, his experiences, his imagination. All he knew of space was from what he could perceive, playing such a role. And that wasn't wrong, per se, it just also wasn't

completely right, and it pushed his perspective in a direction that was ultimately less than effective.

This perspective is also precisely where Job, James, and John are right now, in our readings this morning.

Job, especially, we can understand. After all he has gone through, after all he has suffered and that has been lost, he desires nothing more than to place his grievance before God, certain that he is in the right and that, in making his argument, he will be vindicated. His perspective, at this point in the story before meeting with God, is that of the dance-floor - he may be aware that there are other people out there living their lives in the great big world, but all his understanding, all his view, is based on his own personal sphere. Again, not wrong, per se, but not completely right, either.

And to less extreme extents, this is true for most of us. We go about our days mindful of our schedules, our needs, our interests and desires. We know there's a big world out there, but we focus our perspective and understanding through what is immediately before us each day. Whatever happens is most often filtered through the lens of, "how does this effect me?"

We see this, also, in the very understandable and relatable concerns of James and John. In many ways, they are still struggling with accepting and comprehending what Jesus has told all the disciples: that he is to be handed over and crucified, that as Messiah, he will not be a warrior-king, conquering hero. And with that, the disciples will also face similar realities. James and John, perhaps being cousins of Jesus, want to ensure that they, at least, receive a greater measure of recognition and glory, and perhaps even an easier road. Their concern, their perspective is of the impact upon themselves. They are viewing the dance from the level of the dance floor, to use Heifetz's illustration.

When we allow ourselves to see the world, to understand the world, primarily through our own perspective, then that directs our attention and our actions in ways that primarily benefit us. Again, not a critique, but rather a recognition of how the process works. Whether it be each of us in our daily living, or William Shatner going to space with a specific expectation of validating everything he's dreamed and imagined, or James and John wanting to secure their place, or Job seeking vindication that he has been unduly beset upon by suffering, the dance-floor view centers "me" and "mine," with little room for anything - or anyone - else.

But there's another view, as well, to balance out the dance-floor view. Heifetz also talks about the balcony view, wherein someone us up above the dance floor and can see the whole picture in a glance. From this perspective, everything is visible; someone taking the balcony view can see how movement over in this corner affects what is happening, influencing and directing, people and movements on the other side of the room.

This is not meant to be a better view, but it is a balance to the dance-floor view; ideally, the two views are held in tension, in a conversation in which each informs the other so that the best action, the most effective movement is achieved.

We see this in response to our examples already listed. In response to James and John, Jesus reminds them that, even if they are able to "drink the cup that he must drink," what they are asking is not within the realm of granting. More than that, Jesus reminds them that the mission they are about - namely, the bringing of salvation and good news into the world - is not about them; it's about the world, and it's about the presence of God, the Kingdom of God in the world.

Job, in an even more blatant example, receives a response that many biblical scholars argue is not actually a direct response. As he lays his argument before God, as he makes his case and claims for vindication, God instead responds with, "Were you there when the universe was created, formed and fashioned with a thought and a word? Where were you when the waters of the ocean were told to come this far and no further? Were you the one to place the stars in the heavens, and appoint the courses of the planets?"

In short, Job may be correct in his arguments, but there's a bigger perspective at play, as well, and Job has lost sight of it, and his place within it. As I mentioned last week, Wisdom Literature in the Bible is all about helping us to realign with the grand scheme of creation, our place in it, and who we are in relation to God.

In both of these instances, the intent of reminding James, John, and Job of the balcony view in such an abrupt manner is a shock, but it is meant to bring them back into balance, back into perspective. They had shifted too far into their own dance-floor perspective; they needed to be reminded of the other end of the spectrum, as well. And from this, the hope is that they would be able to live, to act, and ultimately to minister more effectively, more faithfully again.

Shatner spent his life looking to the stars, envisioning and imagining life and exploration "out there." His actual encounter with space, moving himself from the dance-floor view to the balcony view, was jarring, but it did have the effect of helping him balance and realign his perspective. Rather than looking always to the vast mystery of space for answers, he realized what gifts we have here at hand. "I had thought that going into space would be the ultimate catharsis of that connection I had been looking for between all living things...I had a different experience, because I discovered that the beauty isn't out there, it's down here, with all of us. Leaving that behind made my connection to our tiny planet even more profound."

When we balance our own dance-floor view with the balcony view, especially in the light of faith and the promise of the good news of the resurrection, it affects and directs how we respond to the world and what actions we take. We recognize that there is immense suffering, and that sometimes we are the ones who suffer so, but that there is also an immense beauty in the world, and a God who has not deserted us or it. Rather than

being beaten down by difficulties, we are able to face them and faithfully proclaim that there is something more, and that we are agents of that something, the very Kingdom of God.

It is easy to be drawn to live only in our own immediate, dance-floor view. It is what's right around us, and we are creatures wired to see to our well-being. But, in faith, we know and understand that we are created in the image of God and set only a little lower than angels. As we strive to keep a balance between our immediate view and our big-picture view - the dance floor and the balcony - we do so that we may live in faith and proclaim to a world in need that there is life, there is hope, there is good. We are so called, and may we so live and make such proclamation, for the glory of God. Amen.

*(Sermon preached by Rev. Jason Cashing at Clarence Presbyterian Church)*