

Perspective

A couple weeks ago,
when the clean-up from storm Isaias was just getting underway,
I ran into a young man I know from church who does landscaping now.
I figured he must be about the only person in town who was happy with all
the mess,
cause after all, his business is all about cleaning people's yards.
So I greeted him cheerfully, and asked how things were going,
fully expecting an equally cheerful response.
But he said, you know, Alida, it's not so great, to be honest.
Really? I said, but business must be really good?
Oh sure, he said, but -- People are just so cranky right now.
Like even people who are usually pretty nice to me.
It's like they're losing it.
This one guy, Alida, he said,
he just called me on my cell and yelled at me because there's a branch in his
backyard that I haven't had a chance to pick up yet.
And I'm thinking to myself,
dude, there are people with trees through their roofs, you know.
Maybe a little perspective, right?

And he and I started talking more.
About the craziness of this year, and the worries that people are living with,
and how it is so tough to keep perspective.
Not just about tree branches in the yard,
but about everything —
about what matters and what doesn't, or shouldn't.

I've been thinking about that ever since.
About keeping perspective.
And wondering what that even means in 2020.

There's a pandemic, for crying out loud,
 and we're heading into what will probably be the ugliest election ever,
 and there a lot of bad and sorrowful things happening —
 so is it really all that helpful to have someone say
 well you gotta keep your perspective.

What that heck does THAT mean in 2020?
 And how does it not just sound — tone-deaf.
 Perspective? really?

And that's when I picked up a book that Marcia Carothers had given me,
 which had been sitting on the edge of my desk waiting for me to read it.
 Maybe you've seen it.

It's called "The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse,"
 and since it's a #1 bestseller,
 I'm obviously one of the last people to find out about it —
 so thank goodness for Marcia.

The New York Times calls it not only a thought provoking, discussion
 worthy story, but an object of art.

That's because every page has a drawing —
 the author of this little treasure is the renowned artist Charlie Mackesy.

And it is really rather lovely,
 and thoughtful, and wise.

The plot, sort of a plot,
 has a lonely boy meeting up with a mole, a fox and a horse.

Who all have wisdom to share.

Think of the Little Prince or the Alchemist or even Winnie the Pooh.

Let me share just a few pages of it with you:

I've learned how to be in the present [said the mole]

How? asked the boy

*I find a quiet spot and shut my eyes and breathe.
That's good, and then?
Then I focus.
What do you focus on?
Cake, said the mole.*

And this, from the horse:
*Sometimes, said the horse.
Sometimes what? asked the boy.
Sometimes just getting up and carrying on
is brave and magnificent.*

But it was this part of the book which really made me take notice.
This is when I really started to get what the book was all about:

*When the dark clouds come, keep going.
When the big things feel out of control,
focus on what you love right under your nose.*

*When the big things feel out of control,
focus on what you love right under your nose.*

Oh — I thought — this little book is about **perspective!**
About staying focused on what keeps you okay —
whether it's cake
or what you love, right under your nose.

There's a story about Jesus that I love.
Well, obviously, there are a lot of stories about Jesus that we love.

It's a tiny little story,
all of six verses long.

Goes like this:

Passing through the tiny town of Bethsaida, on his way to somewhere more important,

Jesus comes across a blind man.

Actually, comes across the blind man's friends, who have dragged him out to meet Jesus,

and who beg Jesus to touch and heal him.

Jesus, the story says, takes the blind man by the hand and leads him down the road,

out of the town, away from the crowds.

Then he stops, spits on his hands and rubs the man's eyes. There's a pause while the man blinks and looks around.

And then Jesus asks,

"Can you see anything?"

And here's where the story takes a funny little turn.

"In all honesty?" replies the blind man. "No, not exactly.

I mean, I do see people, but they look more like trees, walking."

"Hmmm," says Jesus,

or one imagines he says "Hmmm."

And he touches the blind man again.

A second touch.

A second touch of his eyes,

and then, it says, then, the world swam into focus and the blind man saw.

[visual] Our own Diana Rose Smith, a talented artist who grew up in this church, created this beautiful depiction of Jesus' second touch in a painting she did for us two years ago that now hangs in the parsonage.

My father has always said that this is his favorite story about Jesus.

He loves the way that Jesus is so gentle, so concerned.

"Can you see yet?" he says. "No, not yet? Then here, let me do it again."

You get the feeling, says my Dad,
 that Jesus isn't going to leave the scene
 until he's sure that this man truly can see clearly,
 not just see, but see everything clearly.
 In focus.

In focus.
 It's a story about Jesus blessing someone with clear vision.
 With focus.
 So it strikes me that we need to ask for the same blessing.
 A blessing of focus.
 A blessing of perspective.
 In this most disorienting of years,
 when we are, yes, crankier and rightly so,
 when all is overwhelming and rightly so,
 we, too, need the blessing of focus. Of perspective.
 We all need that healing second touch from Jesus' hands.

Let me take you back to this little book again,
 and then I'm going to ask you to think about something for a moment.
 I'll just read this page again ...
*When the big things feel out of control
 focus on what you love right under your nose.*

So here's what I want you to think about.
 I'm going to give you a minute of quiet to call to mind right now
 what you love that's right under your nose.
 Maybe it's someone with you now, or someone who is on your heart right
 now.
 Maybe it's not a someone — maybe it's something else in your life
 that is a source of joy, that you love having in your life.
Focus on what you love right under your nose.

Whatever it is you were thinking of just now,
whoever it was,
that's who or what you'll need to return to
in those moments when it seems overwhelming,
or when the anxiety, the crankiness sets in.
Whatever it is that is your love and joy,
that's what will help you have the gift of perspective.

To be very clear,
I'm not for a moment suggesting that we should ever turn away
from what is real and important and needs our attention.
Christians are those who pay attention to the world around them,
who weep with those who weep
and rejoice with those who rejoice,
and cry out with the oppressed.
We talk about that all the time here.

But for us to be those people.
for us to be strong, and true,
and faithful, and hope-filled,
we need to let God's hands touch the eyes of our spirits
and open them to what is true, and what is faith, and what is hope.
We need to see the love that is right under our nose.

And whenever that seems shaky —
whenever everything around us starts seeming overwhelming and things are
out of focus,
that's when we need to ask for the second touch of Jesus' hands.
That's when we need to say,
“I can see, Jesus, but I'm not seeing things so clearly right now,
can you just bless me one more time.”
And maybe it's not the second touch we're asking for,

maybe it's the forty-second or the hundred-and-second,
but that's okay.
His hands of healing will touch us one more time,
again and again,
to help us focus always on what is most true and most real.
To help us, always, to see Love most clearly.

Amen.