

Several years ago, my daughters and I were in Gaffney, so we drove up and wandered around the Peachoid. We got the notion to have their picture taken from an angle that made it look like they were holding up the giant peach. There's a photography term for that technique: forced perspective.

Forced perspective is a photography technique that uses the space between your subjects to create an interesting or unusual relationship between them. This photography trick manipulates the viewer's perception of the space and distance between two objects, creating an optical illusion.¹ The classic example of this is the many tourists who have their picture taken at the leaning tower of Pisa.

When I was travelling out west recently, I saw a group of teens attempting this photography technique ~ one kid was trying to look like he was squishing down one of the distant plateaus; and another was holding a pencil in one hand while making a face like he was blowing off the crumbly bits after erasing the top of a mesa.

One evening, my husband and I went up to the Grand Canyon's Powell Point. As the sun began to set, everyone got quiet, spoke only in whispers, and together we witnessed the majesty and miracle of an ordinary sunset. No optical illusions, no perspectives needed forcing. All of us knew this was, for lack of a better term, a mountaintop moment. The grandeur of that vast expanse was breathtaking, and all of us felt the urge to try to capture it on our cameras, to contain the holy moment so we could later revisit it.

There's a strong theme in our readings this morning of humanity in its various conditions ~ did you notice? Isaiah very poetically describes God as a mother nursing and consoling her baby at her breast, dandling her child upon her knee. In my mind, I see her hands holding the child under the arms, providing a sense of security, bouncing her knee up and down, humming a tune punctuated with the child's squeals of delight. Small children don't need the proverbial mountaintop experiences, because they are so good at living in the present, and relishing the joy that is to be found in the moment.

Paul expresses his distress with the community in Galatia ... how they have allowed division to be sown amongst themselves, and have become entrenched in resentment toward one another. He speaks of their spiritual laziness ~ that they are resting their

¹ <https://www.format.com/magazine/resources/photography/forced-perspective-photography>

laurels on hollow, legalistic piety and self-righteous smugness rather than exercising generosity of spirit and following in the way of Christ. In Paul's view, they've allowed too much distance between them and the one whom they profess as the primary focus of their lives, inhabiting the foreground and God conveniently positioned somewhere in the background. Paul clearly feels that this community needs some fresh perspective on who they are, whose they are, and what they are to be about.

Luke describes Jesus sending 70 of his followers to spread his peace to the households and communities to which he himself intends to go. He makes a point of instructing these missionaries to receive with gratitude the hospitality extended to them, eating and drinking whatever their hosts provide. These missionaries are to share the Good News with those who have ears to hear, as well as receive the goodness and care of a people as yet unacquainted with the love of Christ. Luke's portrait of this commissioning portrays the missionaries being instructed about the reciprocal nature of Christian ministry; and Jesus is forcing a perspective that they likely had not considered, much less experienced.

These snapshots of the faith journey are all so earthy, so fleshy, so human.

Sitting on the rim of the canyon that night, I couldn't get over how BIG it all was. Photographs and videos can't properly capture the enormity of that space. It was a holy moment as I pondered how small I am in a world this big.

Sometimes, not unlike the people of Galatia to whom Paul wrote, we can get caught up in theology, ethics and the 'right' way of doing faith that we forget what it's all about. We get so mixed up in the doing of our faith, being sure that others identify us by our faith, that we lose sight of living our faith. It's as though we forget the incarnational piece ... which of course is the central piece, the only piece that really matters.

Since the sun had set, our walk back to our lodge was a really dark walk. The sky was overcast, so the moon and stars couldn't light our way. I began to notice how my normal day to day anxieties were creeping back in after the interior spaciousness I experienced up on the rim. Our vacation was drawing to a close, and I started fretting about the kids back home, the lawn that wasn't getting mown, whether the dog was getting his meds on time each evening. And then there were the bigger worries that settled back in: the news report I'd heard about another church shooting in Alabama, the flooding in Yellowstone, and any number of other major national and world events. Every few steps, heart grew increasingly heavy.

I got sucked so easily and so quickly back into that space of forgetting that God is infinitely bigger than I am. It's not that my cares and concerns aren't important, of

course they are. But God's got it all under control. God's always got it under control. My job, our job, at any given moment, is to not allow ourselves to be 'daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. We are do justly now. We are to love mercy now. We are to walk humbly now. We are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are we free to abandon it.'² In the words of the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "we are to do our little bit of good where we are; [because] it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

My husband noticed that the sky had cleared soon after we reached our room. It must've been around midnight, so we found a treeless area, laid down on the ground and watched the stars. A few satellites zoomed by, and shooting stars occasionally zipped past. Just above us was the Milky Way ~ another reminder of just how small my worries and concerns really are. A needed reorientation, a divinely-inspired, gently-forced perspective.

My prayer for you this week is that you are able to find some quiet space, a time when you can reorient and widen your view ~ taking full, deep, cleansing breaths that create a calm interior space ~ and recognize your unique place in God's kingdom. Should you feel like you're carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders, may that illusion be brought into proper perspective. May you not grow weary in doing what is right. May 'peace be with you' be a constant refrain. May you find yourself able to both give and receive in a spirit of generosity and gratitude. And may you always remember that God loves you; God is always ready to hold you close and comfort you; and God delights in your joy.

² Micah 6:8, adapted by Rabbi Tarfon: <https://reformjudaism.org/beliefs-practices/spirituality/3-jewish-reminders-when-world-seems-overwhelming>