

PREFACE TO A SERMON SERIES
September 4, 2016 – November 13, 2016

I want to preface this season of sermons with a flawed metaphor. You are in the ophthalmologist's chair and the clinician tells you to lean forward and put your chin on that little cup. Then she begins flipping lenses of various strengths saying, "Tell me which is better: one or two...one or two...one or two." Sometimes there is no contest. "Two," you say with conviction. But other times, it is too close to call. You hesitate and, if you hesitate long enough, she tries again: "One or two." Hmmm. Finally, if you cannot decide, she gives you an out: "Or about the same." As I grew older and my glasses grew thicker, I found myself increasingly anxious that I get this little exercise right; that my ones were really one and my twos were really two, so that the resulting prescription would correct my vision, would help me see the world clearly.

Some seasons more than other seasons, I think the voice of that clinician plays like a broken record in our minds: one or two, Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, Christian or Muslim, winners or losers, Giants fans or Eagles fans, us or them. According to merriamwebster.com, the conjunction "or" is "used in logic as a...connective that forms a complex sentence which is true when at least one of its constituent sentences is true." For example: "either you are for us or against us." Except that generally the sentences using "or" in the days after 9/11 have been anything but complex. Binary thinking has become our way of being in this nation, has focused our way of seeing one another in the world.

All of this is why, when I sat down this summer to plan out the sermons for the fall, I found myself drawn to another conjunction and so another way of connecting the opposites lurking in the lectionary readings as well as in our lives. "And," according to merriamwebster.com, is a conjunction used to join words or groups of words. Peter Elbow, a retired professor of English, suggests that a kinder, gentler way of seeing the world and one another is a way he calls the dialogic both/and. His thinking follows particle physicist Nils Bohr: "The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth."

Mindful that it would be a season when we would be dealing with emotionally charged events, and so be prone to binary thinking, I wanted to use Scripture as a lens that would help us to try on, to enter into, to see, as if for the first time, the both/and in us all. Hence the sermon titles going forward are: Powerful and Powerless, Rich and Poor, Captive and Free, Grateful and Gripping, Injured and Healed, Proud and Humble, Fearful and Faithful.