

BOTH SIDES NOW

In 1967, Joni Mitchell formed these broken hearted words:

Bows and flows of angel hair and ice cream castles in the air,  
and feather canyons everywhere, I've looked at clouds that way.  
But, now they only block the sun, they rain and snow on everyone.  
So many things I would have done, but clouds got in my way.

I've looked at clouds from both sides now, from up and down,  
And still somehow it's clouds illusions I recall;  
I really don't know clouds at all.

Invested unfulfilled promises, broken dreams and **illusions** exposed – all can lead to insight and growth.... **or** ..to bitterness and self protected isolation, with more fabrications and justifications.

This is puff the magic dragon slipping into his cave.  
This is the crash of teenage romance.  
This is naive seminary students being blown out of the water.  
This is failing miserably.  
This is a soldier's bravado evaporated by the horror of a Real battle.  
This is the whimper of the mid-life crisis.  
This is may be the end of our personal story.  
This is can be the quick—the survivors burying the dead.

The scream of reality's truth can startle the soul to life..... or it can make us run,.... run very hard into fantasy land's caverns.

I dare say, everyone's life possess mixed threads of fiction and cogent truth,..... and sometimes we forget which is which, especially... when we try to put our best **side** forward for others to see.

Sometimes the public charade gets the best of us..... or I should say the worst of us.

Archibald Belaney tried very hard to be the noble GREY OWL, yet even his worthy conservation message was cast aside when he was exposed. People don't like to be fooled.

Yet, it seems most **famous** people cultivate their "character" / their "persona" .... to a certain degree. Many form and nurture an image.

Richard Nixon used to talk about himself in the third person.  
Elvis Presley honed his unique appearance.

Even Bono of U2 stays in character whenever he is out in the public.

And, no doubt, there is some truth in those cultivated presentations, yet there is also a lot of make believe,.... and we're fine if we see all sides.

The rock band, KISS, that recently was in Saskatoon, comes to mind as an example of the extreme, with make up and all. Gene Simmons, one of the founding members of the group, is a crafty entrepreneur. He is selling a product, and we are well aware that he is not really the character he plays, The Demon, .... :) well I think we are aware..<

Interestingly, some traits / labels / perceptions stick regardless if that is desired or not.

A former Prime Minister could never shake the label "Mr Dithers."

While William Shatner still milks the title "Captain Kirk."

And, then there is poor old Ebenezer Scrooge.

When we hear his name, we instantly form an opinion of him, this fictional person in a *Christmas Carol*, created by Charles Dickens.

If you recall, he changed. He had a rebirth / an ontological renaissance.

Yet, we still judge him by what he was.

Pity poor Ebenezer Scrooge. We only see one side of him, at a time.

This brings us to King David.

King David must have had great P.R. people,.....we know them as writers of parts of the Bible.

David is generally thought of in an admirable manner,.... well ...except for the little incident with Bathsheba. .... Little,.... lives were lost because of that .... "little" affair.....

Even so, when we recall David, the shepherd king comes to mind, as does a boy slaying Goliath, and countless heartfelt poems and songs.

We may even remember the warrior side of David – the King who conquered others and built a nation.

Today's text is said to be his last words..... oh, and they are truly lofty and grand words – words worthy of the great King,.... that is if you like to join in the cultivation of the hype / the myth.

I've seen many people die. No one speaks in such a manner.

Most can barely talk, and the few who can, speak in a transcendent / detached manner.

Even scholars agree that these are not really David's last words.

This passage contains what the subsequent Hebrew generations wanted their King David to say. It is the perpetuation / the spin of the image.

No doubt, David had his good side, but a carefully reading of the Bible also reveal his ruthless, cruel nature, too. David orchestrated the death of many people, including King Saul and his family.

Can we handle that whole picture? Can we believe in a loving and gracious God, if we can NOT take ALL the words of the Bible literally?

Can we live with Old Testament style of pictorial narrative?

Can we respect King David, the tenderhearted and the murderer?

Can we embrace each other in truth, knowing we possess both virtues and flaws?

Can we love and be disappointed, too?

Or, do we just want:

Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels,

The dizzy dancing way you feel,

as every fairy tale comes real,

I've looked at love that way.

But now it's just another show,

You leave 'em laughing when you go,

And if you care, don't let them know.

Don't give yourself away.

I've looked at love from both sides now,

From give and take and still somehow,

It's love's illusions I recall;

I really don't know love at all.

Perhaps, we should polish our facade and pretend we are above the fray.

Yet, charlatans don't go out on the dance floor— and life's vibrancy will be out of reach, but the world of make-believe sure seems a lot safer....

– Can illusion keep us safe from being surprised?

–safe from being broken hearted?

–Do myths protect us from disappointments and shattered dreams, ... and we love illusions?

National illusions motivate citizens to do all sorts of things....

Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels are so..... appealing, ....as are big buildings, drums, tanks and supersonic jets.

With the orchestra in the background, we can picture the famous King David, extolling exquisite, awe-inspiring last words from his dying parched lips.

Juxtaposed to that cultivated image,.... we have the “apparent” grand disappointment.. ...of a beaten and stripped Jesus dying on the cross.

His last words were mostly from anguish and pain.

The trial and crucifixion of Jesus must have felt like betrayal and extreme disappointment,.....for many of the spectators and admirers of Christ.

They heard from him a message of hope and empowerment for the underclass and the outcasts. They enjoyed the stories of the miracles, and dreamed of more miracles. They loved the flashy side of Jesus; the suffering side wasn't so appealing. They wanted their vision for a king.

It is not easy dealing with loss.  
It is not easy having our illusions popped.

Nevertheless, Pilate's interrogation of Jesus offers us some much needed insight. The courtroom conversation gives us a view of ...Both Sides. Jesus was a great teacher, a miracle worker and healer, and... he was more, including being a humbleservant and a connection from God.

Pilate is in character as a powerful political leader, and he asks Jesus if he is a political King? Jesus wants to converse with all of Pilate, not just the image side, and responds with a probing personal question to Pilate.

Pilate stumbles, but regains composure and presses on in the manner of a good Roman leader—the role he strives to present.

Yet, Pilate softens his approach, and asks, “What have you done?”, instead of demanding a response to the charges against him.

Surprisingly, Jesus gives a defence by seemingly answering the charges against him. However, Jesus gives the big picture—Jesus' Kingdom / domain is not from this world. His followers are not like soldiers who fight for a leader. Jesus is the whole story. Jesus is both sides NOW. He is in the present and the beyond ..... all at once.

Pilate is baffled, and returns to asking Jesus if he really is a King.

By now, Pilate's head is likely spinning, and Jesus pushes him to reach for the truth—to go beyond the spin and illusion and grab the truth.

Verse 38 wasn't included in today's lesson, but it should have been.

Verse 38 is Pilate's response, “What is truth?”

>> What is truth?

John's version of this trial is well crafted, and thought provoking.

Mark's account has Jesus only saying THREE insignificant Words.

What is the whole story? What is truth?

We like to think in terms of either / or.... yes or no.... up or down, but maybe truth is beyond that.

Maybe truth is all of the above.

Maybe truth is Both Sides Now.

Maybe truth is in the question?

Maybe truth is in the mystery.

But,..... HOW can that abstract thinking bring hope and comfort when we are alone in the darkness, waiting for a loved one to return.

What do we hold on to when we are searching for solid ground?

How are to deal with grief when up is also down?

We want answers.....

We want the doctor to give us absolutes. We want answers!..... or do we? ????????

That is where Pilate stumbled.

How can we grieve a loved one if we can not be honest?

Can we not Both honour the good in someone.... and be saddened by the ugly side.... as we grieve?

Can we..... NO....wait.... we MUST be honest.

If the truth mandates it, then grief can contain anger, sadness, disappointment and joy... all wrapped up together.

For our own health we need to accept and embrace... Both sides / all sides. The entire picture – the complete person.

Back to Joni Mitchell:

Dreams and schemes and circus crowds,

I've looked at life that way.

But now old friends are acting strange,

They shake their heads,

**They say I've changed,**

**But something's lost**

**But Something's gained,**

**In living every day.**

**I've looked at life from both sides now,**

**From win and lose and still somehow**

**It's life's illusions I recall,**

**I really don't know life at all.**

People..... Life is Part mystery.... because Life is about relationships!

And, wholesome and healing relationships include LOVE....and love is a mystery..... a mystery from God.

Pilate stumbled over this.

He was left holding a question.

The truth was before him, and he missed it because Pilate wanted answers.

He missed Jesus because he wanted answers.

God comes to us with Jesus.

The Bible is an introduction / a series of stories about relationships / relationships with God.

God comes to us with the face of Jesus—God humble, full of love, a person.  
Let's not make Pilate's mistake.

Moreover, as we consider the options.... Let us consider who we are... all sides.  
And, let us embrace our losses..... as we live with hope.  
Honest life is Both sides now.  
God comes to us where we re – all of us / all sides, and we are invited into relationship.

Before we light candles, let us pause in prayer.

Gracious God.  
We keenly know ourselves, and you do, too.  
We are complicated. We've made mistakes, and are humbled that you love us anyways.

Help us to respond in truth to your invitation to follow Christ.  
Help us to live in truth.  
Help us to remember in truth.  
In Jesus name.....