

Interview with Davey Morrison Dillard

BY KATHERINE COWLEY



What was the process of writing “Blind Man”?

Usually I write a poem in one sitting, spending a half hour to an hour just letting the words flow. I like to write poems with a paper and pen, in a place where I can feel peaceful, often outside. Later I make some minor changes when I go back to type it up—a few words, some differences in punctuation or line breaks, usually only a handful of changes more noticeable than that.

What I like about poetry is that it’s sort of like music with words—I like to sit down with my guitar and try to find new combinations of notes until an interesting melody or chord progression appears; so, with poetry, I like to sit down with a central image or idea or metaphor and let the words and the sounds and the ideas and the emotions take me where they will. It can feel a lot more freeing sometimes than writing something longer or more structured, like drama or fiction, where you have to think about plot and setups and pay-offs and sort of left-brained things like that.

Poetry is beautiful because it’s one of the most direct and honest means of expression. Reading old poems often tells me a lot more about who I was and what I was thinking and feeling at the time of writing than any journal I’ve ever kept.

What initially interested you in the story of the blind man in John 9?

I was reading and re-reading the Gospels last year and was fascinated by the idea of Jesus as a

real human being, who lived and breathed and walked around and told jokes and made people smile. Sometimes it’s very easy to forget the most sacred thing about Christ—that He was human.

With that way of looking at things, I was very interested in thinking about how the other characters in the stories experienced Jesus—what they thought of Him, how they saw Him, and why. I especially love the story in John 9. It’s incredibly poignant reading that chapter from the blind man’s point of view—he hears the conversation between Christ and His apostles, he’s told by someone he’s never met to do the most ridiculous thing (put mud over his eyes and wash it off) without even being given a reason. He does it in one of the most profound acts of faith ever recorded, and, miraculously, he’s healed.

And the testimony he gives—the one that concludes the poem—is one of the most beautiful found in all of scripture. He doesn’t know Jesus is the Messiah—the thought had probably never even entered his mind—but he knows that he was healed. He testifies, and he doesn’t back down from his testimony, even when he may have been beginning to realize how politically dangerous it was to hold to his story. He was healed, and the only way he could show the gratitude he owed was to honor and testify of the healing. That’s a wonderful testimony because it’s so incredibly personal.

And then there’s the other profoundly moving moment in the story, which occurs after my poem ends, when he’s in the streets and he hears Jesus talking and recognizes the voice of the man who

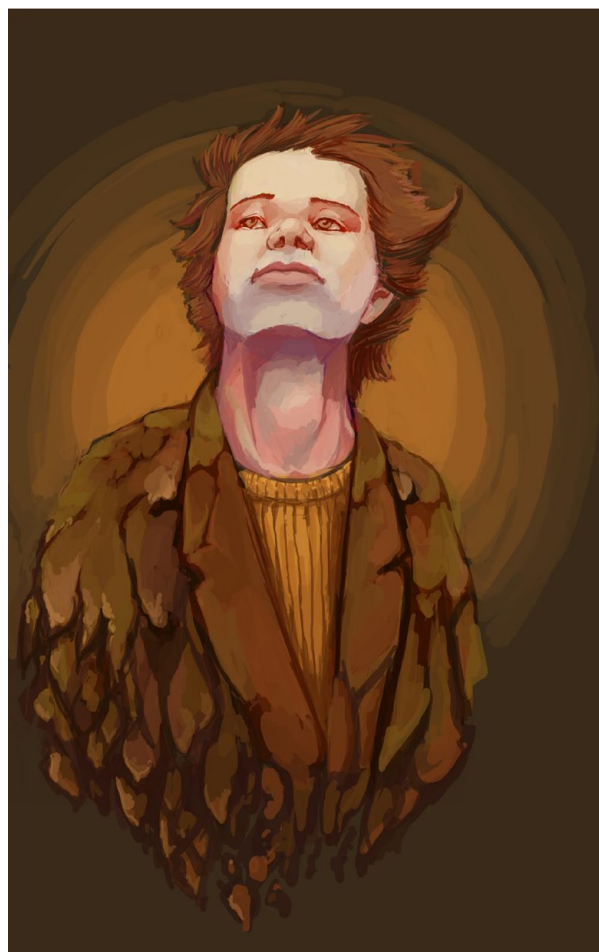
healed him. What an incredible moment for him and for us. It's just a beautiful story, and beautiful storytelling. I think I can relate to that blind man more than I can relate to almost anyone else in the scriptures.

Why did you choose to express yourself in poetry? What about the story of the blind man was conducive to the form of a poem?

Well, in some ways I suppose I feel like I couldn't write a film about it because it's already been written. Martin Scorsese ends *Raging Bull* with the blind man's testimony that also ends my poem (if you're going to rip off, rip off from the best). Seeing that film deeply humanized the scriptural story for me. It's not a movie a lot of members of the Church will want to watch, and that's understandable, but I think it's a very moving and very powerful testimony.

Other than that, I chose poetry for a couple of probably less interesting reasons. First of all, I was writing a lot of poetry at the time, so I was in the groove. And I also just felt naturally that what I had to say about the story was inherently more conducive to poetry than to a traditional dramatic arc.

We all know what happens to the blind man, and I really don't have anything to add except perhaps something to underline the insight in that pure moment of testimony—the humility of it, the faith. What a strange and beautiful story it really is—an amazing metaphor when he is asked to sully his eyes, which are already blind, and it is only after he does so and is washed clean that he is able to see, that he is perfected. Any one of us who



has felt imperfect, fallen, or unclean can relate to that. Anyone who has been baptized, anyone who has been made clean by their Savior, physically or spiritually, can relate. That's the story of the Atonement. That's the Plan of Salvation, all in that amazing little story. ■