

Reading the book of Acts, we discover that such augmentation of reality is really nothing new. In the early Christian church, spiritual innovations, not technical ones, made the real world better.

One day, in the city of Jerusalem, the apostles Peter and John encounter a crippled beggar. Peter says to him, "*I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk*" (3:6). The beggar's reality is that he has been lame since birth. Every day he sprawls on the ground and asks people for money as they enter the temple. Peter augments his reality by offering him healing in the name of Jesus. Acts tells us that "*jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God*" (3:8). From being lame to leaping. This is the real world, but better.

In this case, "augmented" doesn't do justice to the transformation this lame man experienced. His reality is completely altered! It is more than simply augmented; he is, to use Pauline language, "a new creation." Unfortunately, this healing upsets the status quo. Not everyone wants you to mess with their reality...their truth...their control of things.

The captain of the temple, the priests and the Sadducees come to Peter and John, "*much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead*" (vv. 1-2). They are "much annoyed" - like a homeowner who faces a crowd of *Pokémon Go* players in his front yard. Jerusalem's religious leaders arrest Peter and John and put them in custody. The next day, the high priest asks Peter and John, "*By what power or by what name did you do this?*" (v. 7). He wants to know: "What is the secret to this reality changing transformation?"

Peter responds with words that are not entirely his own. Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us that Peter is helped, guided, perhaps augmented, by "*the Holy Spirit*" (v. 8). "*Rulers of the people and elders,*" Peter says, "*let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead*" (vv. 8, 10).

Peter says that it is the power of God, seen in the resurrection of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit that is the secret to this augmented reality and this completely new creation. Jerusalem's leaders are threatened by this new reality. They are shocked

that their authority is questioned by these two "*uneducated and ordinary men*" (v. 13). Luke tells us that 5,000 people convert and live in this augmented reality as new creations in Christ: and all this is quite outside the realm of the religious leaders' control. Five thousand people, all of them hungry for a better world.

Peter concludes by saying, "*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved*" (v. 12). Salvation comes from the power of the name of Jesus Christ, the One whom God raised from the dead, and who still works to save us from sickness, sin and death.

In our reality, there is human effort. People can cook meals, build houses, write books, deliver medical care, teach children and compose music. Some people can even perform different functions at the same time. "I'm great at multitasking," said one person. "I can waste time, be unproductive and procrastinate all at once."

But in God's augmented reality, the power of the Holy Spirit is the extraordinary add-on. When we open ourselves to the Spirit, our human efforts become part of God's work in the world. We cook meals to feed our hungry neighbors, build houses for the homeless, write books to uplift and inspire, deliver medical care in the developing world, teach children in underserved communities and compose music that glorifies God. What made the words of Peter powerful was that he was "*filled with the Holy Spirit*" (v. 8). The very same is true for us, when our words and actions are augmented by the Spirit.

In our reality, there is sin. According to Christian tradition, the seven deadly sins are lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride. Most of us have committed at least a few. On the back panel of a popular T-shirt, there's a list of these sins with a checkbox next to each of them. At the bottom, someone scrawled the word "Done!"

But in God's augmented reality, we find forgiveness. On the cross, Jesus took the sins of the world on himself, and died so that we might receive forgiveness and new life. "*There is salvation in no one else,*" said Peter (v. 12). Jesus is the One who saves us from the sins that separate us from God. The powerful name of Jesus is what augments our reality of sin with the even more powerful reality of forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

In our reality, there is death. "Nothing is certain," said Benjamin Franklin in the 1700s, "but death and taxes." With April 15th now behind us, we are keenly aware of the reality of taxes. And death is a more of requirement than a suggestion. The death rate is the same as ever: one death per person.

But in God's super-augmented reality, we find eternal life. The grave is not the end for anyone who trusts Jesus, because he is the one "*whom God raised from the dead*" (v. 10). God overcomes the cross for Jesus, and God overcomes our deaths as well, receiving us into everlasting life. This is an augmented life that is connected to what we know in this world, but which also goes far beyond it. As Saint Augustine said in one of his prayers, "We shall rest, and we shall see. We shall see, and we shall know. We shall know, and we shall love. We shall love, and we shall praise. Behold our end which is no end."

Resting, seeing, knowing, loving and praising are all part of the real world. We experience them and understand them. But in everlasting life, they are augmented by the saving power of God, and they connect us to God and to each other for all eternity. They are real, but better. Such augmented reality is spiritual, not technological. Peter and John experienced it in the resurrection of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. The same can be true for us, as we open our human efforts to the Spirit, and trust that Jesus is offering us forgiveness and eternal life.

Reality is things as they are. No fantasy. No illusion. No wishful thinking. Augmented reality is things as they should be. Through the power of God, we can move from the world as it is to the world as it should be. It's a radical augmentation that makes us virtually new creations in Christ!

Prayer: O God, we long to see you and know you. We do not pretend to have all the answers, for how will we every fully understand your ways? As we study your word today, help us to do so with humility. Let us not dismiss the words that we have already heard, but, instead, open our hearts to the new words you will speak into us. We desire to be changed by you. Use your word to challenge us, teach us and move us toward being more like your Son. In your holy name we ask. Amen.

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Augmented Reality

Sunday, April 22, 2018

Acts 4:5-12

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

For the past two years, one of the hottest games on smartphones has been *Pokémon Go*. Players walk the streets like zombies, staring at their phones and hunting for collectible characters. Thanks to modern software, gamers are playing in real time and in real places. The game is tied to real-world landmarks and the most popular sites have true historic significance.

This came as a surprise to a man in Massachusetts. Large numbers of people congregated on his sidewalk and pulled up to his address at odd hours. His home, once a gable-roofed church is now a Pokémon destination. His house is real, but the Charmanders and Squirtles around it are not. They are Pokémon characters, exotic cartoons who seem to be living in and around churches, houses and other places in the real world. From parks in San Francisco to the White House in Washington, characters are popping up everywhere. *Pokémon Go* is an example of augmented reality: the real world enhanced.

Augmented reality is defined as “a technology that superimposes a computer-generated image on a user's view of the real world, thus providing a composite view.” In other words, a computer superimposes virtual objects into the real world. Think of Snapchat where you take a picture of your friend and then add dog's ears or a pig's snout or make their eyes bug out. Or the television ad where the realtor holds her tablet in front of an empty room and it shows what the room could look like furnished. Or military personnel who wear goggles that provide information about the surrounding terrain. This is the real world enhanced by technology.

We need to prepare for the fact that the future will be augmented. We'll have smart windshields on our cars, projecting information on where we are and where we are heading. Teachers will use augmented reality to give students a virtual tour of the human circulatory system. To save lives, experienced surgeons will view operations remotely and provide instructions to the physicians who are doing the surgery. The visually impaired will wear “smart glasses” which send a video feed to a customer service agent, who tells the person what's going on around them. Augmented reality. The real world made better.