

## Blind Sighted

A Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011  
I Samuel 16:1-13; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

*For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.*

Near the end of C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* Aslan the Lion takes all the children to the New Narnia, a place of astonishing light and beauty; a place where every blade of grass seems to mean more and where every creature sings for the sheer joy of the Creator. The author tells us that The New Narnia is a place where everything is just so real in depth and color that the mere sight of a daisy takes your breath away and makes you weep for the sheer beauty of the thing.

In the midst of Narnia's splendor, the children see a group of dwarves huddled together convinced that they are sitting, not in a glorious paradise, but in the stench of a barn, a place so dark that *they cannot see* their hands in front of their faces. Lucy is so upset that the dwarves are not enjoying the New Narnia, that they *are blind* to its splendor, that she begs Aslan to help them *to see* its astonishing light and beauty. The Great Lion replies, "Dearest Lucy, I will show you what *I can do*, and I will show you what *I cannot do*."

Aslan then shakes his golden mane and a sumptuous banquet, like the one we are about share, instantly appears in front of the dwarves. Each one is given a heaping plate with juicy meats, glistening vegetables, plump grains of rice. And each also receives a goblet brimming with the finest wine anyone could ever imagine. But when the dwarves dive in and begin eating, they start gagging and complaining. "Doesn't this beat all," one of them moans. "Not only are we in this stinking stable but now we've got to eat hay and dried cow dung as well!" And when they sip the wine, they sputter and complain, "And look at this! Dirty water [from the] donkey's trough!" The dwarves, Aslan goes on to say, had chosen suspicion and complaint instead of trust and love; and so they were prisoners of their own minds. And so they *could not see* the beauty and splendor of Aslan's New Narnia because they *would not see it*. Aslan can but leave them alone to the hell of their own devising.

---

*So often, it seems, we have  
chosen suspicion and complaint  
rather than trust and love. . . .*

---

So often, it seems, we have chosen suspicion and complaint rather than trust and love; and so, like the dwarves, we are blind to the light and beauty of the "New Narnia" dawning in the Church, "left alone to the hell of our own devising."

"I came into this world for judgment, so that *those who do not see* may see, and *those who do see* may become blind. . . so that *the blind will see* and *those who see will become blind*. . . And when some Pharisees asked if they were the ones who were blind, Jesus responded, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.'"

Today Jesus meets a man who has been blind from birth, a sure sign in those days that somebody had messed up, that someone had sinned for this tragic thing to happen. Jesus' own disciples are the first to ask, "Master, who sinned, this man or his parents?" With just a little spittle and a clod of dirt, reminding us of the creation of the first dust creatures in Genesis, a man who once was blind now can see. "I once was lost but now am found," we'll sing with him later today, "I once was blind but now I see."

The prophet Isaiah had said long ago that when Messiah comes "the eyes of the blind will be opened

and the ears of the deaf unstopped.” So, “. . . great crowds came to [Jesus], bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them. . . .” “The Lord opens the eyes of the blind,” prays the psalmist, “The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. . . .” Here Jesus lifts up someone who is bowed down, and all anyone can do is tear him down. In the end, he is expelled from the synagogue.

Our human nature is just so fiercely consumed with building ourselves up and tearing other people down. Competition. Rivalry. Division. Schism. Call it what you want. But Jesus is consumed with building others up and always ready for himself to be torn down. And the risen Christ ever returns to his cross, Martin Luther reminds us. So the New Testament letters urge the churches to “encourage one

---

*Our human nature is just so fiercely consumed with building ourselves up and tearing other people down. Competition. Rivalry. Division. Schism. Call it what you want. But Jesus is consumed with building others up and always ready for himself to be torn down.*

---

another and build one another up.” “So with yourselves,” Paul writes to the Corinthians, “since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.” “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths,” this letter to the Ephesians admonishes, “but only such as is good for building up. . . . Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

It has happened every time that Jesus performs one of his signs in the Gospel of John that a controversy breaks out, a division, an argument, in order to tear somebody down. Works of darkness are exposed. Is this the same man? Are you sure this is your son? Was he really born blind? Maybe he’s just pretending. We’ve never seen such a thing. How

could God listen to any sinner who breaks the Sabbath law as does this Jesus who breeches one of thirty-nine Sabbath prohibitions by *kneading* the clay between his fingers.

Jesus says early on in this story that what motivated the miracle was not the man’s blindness, not his needs, not even his prayers. The man doesn’t ask to be healed. And “it wasn’t that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him,” Jesus says. “We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

“So, that those who do not see may see.” But nobody seems to be happy about this, especially those who claim to see everything so clearly. Like lots of us, all they want to talk about is sin—somebody else’s sin, of course. All they want to know is who’s to blame for what went wrong. That’s what we’re best at—blaming somebody.

These days, if you happen to catch a cold or the flu, it’s all your fault. You didn’t take enough vitamin C. You didn’t take care of yourself. You didn’t wash your hands after church. It’s all your fault. You know, I can’t remember a time until recently when I ever heard such prattle! When I was kid, you got sick because you were a kid, because you were a human being, and probably because you wanted a day off from school, simple as that, not because you did something wrong! And nobody ran from you, waving you off from a distance, as though you were stricken with leprosy. It seems we would surely make good company with Job’s cruel counselors, intent as they are to blame Job for his unspeakable suffering. But that man Job refuses with all he’s got to say that he has “gotten what he deserves.”

We see someone else suffer, then conclude, “Well, he got what he asked for. She smoked too much; he was always eating at McDonalds; she didn’t take her medications regularly; he wouldn’t listen to his

parents. He had it coming to him. She got what she asked for. And, by the way, I'm sure glad I'm not like that!"

Isn't life difficult enough without having to blame somebody, to tear somebody down, so we can keep our places in the sun with all the other self-righteous, sanctimonious boors? I suppose the blaming game comes with believing that you have control of everything that happens in your life, and what's more, that you can explain everything that happens in your life and someone else's. And when you "lose control," it's all your fault. We have to be able to explain it.

"Okay, where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" That's what the LORD finally asks Job within earshot of his silly counselors, "Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know!"

You see, "people look at the outward appearance but God sees the heart." That's how the LORD explains to the prophet Samuel His choice of the littlest brother, David, to be the greatest king of Israel.

"All I know," says the man who once was lost but now is found, "is that this guy put stuff on my eyes, and I see. I think he must be a prophet. . . [I really don't care how he did it or why]." And the more he talks about what happened, *the more he sees* who Jesus is, so that by the end of the story, the man confesses, "Lord. . . Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Jesus. But the more the others question the man born blind, *the less they see* of Jesus, so that by the end of the story, they throw the man out of the synagogue, saying, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?"

"Dearest Lucy, I will show you *what I can do* and I will show you *what I cannot do.*"

"I came into this world for judgment, so that *those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.* . . ." Over and over in John, we hear people say the same thing, "we know," "we see," "we understand"; these are the very people who do not know, who do not see, who do not understand.

"If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."

Blind because Jesus shines in places where we don't think he should shine. Blind because Jesus sees those to whom we have turned a blind eye. Blind because Jesus just will not play with us our blaming games. Blind because Jesus has no interest in explaining things the way we explain them.

"Human love constructs its own image of the person," we heard last Wednesday night from Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, "of what he is and what he should become. It takes the life of the other person into its own hands. [But] spiritual love recognizes the true image of the other person which [she] has received from Jesus Christ; the image that Jesus Christ himself embodied and would stanp upon all persons."

"...For the LORD does not see as mortals see. . . the LORD looks on the heart."

---

*I suppose the blaming game comes with believing that you have control of everything that happens in your life, and what's more, that you can explain everything that happens in your life and someone else's.*

---