

Sermon for Sunday, October 28

### Hidden in Plain Sight

Halloween, or All Hallows Eve, is coming this Wednesday. I can always start to feel it in the air... between the chill and the crisp scent of fall in the air, it seems like we are wrapped up in autumn by the time we are finally approaching October 31st. "Trunk or treat" is our Ladue Chapel way of bringing some festive fellowship into our midst, and it is such a fun way to celebrate this spooky spirited season in Christian community. There is a treasure trove of joy tucked away in my heart from all the amazingly cute costumes I saw our little ones wearing last year... as I think about a smile just sweeps across my face. Costumes, however, remind me of more than just some especially cute faces in this congregation...

Masquerading is a way of hiding, of concealing or covering up. Job, in verse 42:3, admits that he mistakenly questioned God for hiding. In specific, Job questioned why God did not throw light upon the reasons for suffering. In Job's despair, he begged the Lord to explain the purpose of suffering...to which he received an answer from God's self that helped him to see our Almighty Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer anew- with fresh eyes. No longer did Job simply hear the word of the Lord, but he received a new spiritual vision of his maker. You could even say he came face to face with God.

Similarly, Bartimaeus also receives his vision anew- his eyesight is restored after his encounter with Jesus. Unlike Job, however, is Bartimaeus' blindness not spiritual. Instead he experiences literal, physical blindness, but the strength of his *spiritual* vision was great enough to restore his eyesight. Bartimaeus' blindness did not keep the eyes of his heart from seeing with faith, but he had yet to set his sights on the world. Christ alone could give him vision to see anew.

Transitions in light and darkness cause some changes in what we perceive. Our eyes have to adjust to night vision before we can see in the dark. Even then we are still not able to see with great clarity. But, we can still make things out in general, just not in great detail. Peek-a-boo is another good example. When light is shed on an image, our baby brains say they exist. When light covers the same image, obscuring it from view, our baby brains say that image no longer exists. As newborns, our brains think that the "now you see me, now you don't" phenomenon is attached to existence. As we develop, we learn that what we have seen exists independent of our immediate experience of seeing it.

Job's epilogue demonstrates his development of night vision. He could not see God's reason, good counsel, or divine wisdom in light of his suffering. That darkened his view, in a way. Then, in a simple yet deeply profound shift in his perspective, he is suddenly able to see God- even in the midst of darkness. Jesus' healing of Bartimeaus suggests more of a "post peek a boo" development in eyesight. Timeaus' son knew Jesus existed without seeing him. Bartimaeus trusted faithfully that Christ's existence was not reliant upon his personal ability to lay eyes on him. He was able to have that moment, a great gift from God, to open his eyes quite literally for the first time in his life to see. Whether seeing anew or seeing for the first time, both characters teach us something about sight.

Blindness as a former state of being is not so subtly hinted at in these Scriptures. Like Job, we see pain and suffering with our own two eyes- so our faith sees accordingly: with spiritual blindness. We have to come into the light, or adjust our night vision, to see with eyes of faith again. Our Gospel lesson shares a different story. Even when our spiritual vision is in sharp focus, there is still more to see than meets the eye. In running toward Christ, our sight can only improve for this world. Seeking after the Lord in earnest, literally and figuratively, brings us into the Light.

Somehow linking the light and love of Christ seems to happen on this model. It's like living in the light is the only way to receive, or really to earn, Christ's love. That then starts to look something like this: only a faith that sees with 20/20 vision gets rewarded. A faith with "post peek a boo permanence," gifted with clear spiritual vision- allows for miraculous healings to take place, like for Bartimaeus. A discerning faith- that sees with accurate night vision!- restores blessings tenfold, like for Job. So if we just get our faith right, if we just get our

vision aligned aright, our God will fix us. We will get our fortunes back, our bodies healed, and we can just praise the Good Lord all day long- singing Alleluia!

That kind of faith formula is deceptively simple for a reason. Reading these texts as a prescription for how we are supposed to see allows us to expect blessings in return for our faith. It's easy to begin thinking that by adjusting our vision to the perfect faith lens, we will be rewarded like Job and Bartimaeus. That formula starts to smell of a works righteousness model that the fathers of the Reformation took issue with long ago, suggesting instead that sanctification is not earned and does not award us greater blessings than any other Christian brother or sister. In contrast, our church affirms a grace by faith model, wherein the blessings that come with and from faith are not really the end all be all.

The rewards of faith are not the main points of either of these stories anyway. Both men have faith in spite of suffering in darkness, and that is a gift that keeps on giving in a multitude of ways. That is the real gift here: the Light of Christ, given to us all, even amidst the darkness. We don't have to earn it, or fix ourselves to see it. We are simply called to seek and accept the Light and love of our Good and Gracious God. That in itself is the blessing.

These new beginnings for our guys, Job and B, are interestingly enough, also end points in each respective biblical narrative. One of the greatest books in Old Testament Wisdom Literature closes just as the main character receives new blessings. The Gospel Story ends Jesus' itinerant ministry, closing with a healing miracle, and so begins the passion narrative that starts with Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. New beginnings exist in both our biblical stories, in our Reformed heritage that we celebrate today, and surprisingly, in Halloween's history.

This time of year, historically, is more than just a time of trick or treating and dress up. Traditionally, it was a Celtic festival called Samhain (pronounced Sow-in) that marked their New Year- closing out the summer, and beginning the fall/winter season. The Celts gathered around bonfires lit by their priests, otherwise known as Druids, and danced around in costumes to ward off the spirits they believed came back for one night to roam the earth. They then carried the light of the sacred fire into their hearth fires to fill their home with protection through the night. Out of this beginning, numerous changes took place over the years and morphed into what we now celebrate as Halloween here in America.

Whether it be the commemoration of a new year, the development of a new kind of faith, or new sight- in all of these historical events, traditions and stories, we see Good News. There is a consistent testimony brought forth in Job and Mark's Gospel story, highlighted by the festivities of today: that God remains constantly good. For a proper dose of Reformed theological terminology on our Kirkin of the Tartan Sunday, we will call this the immutability of God- a classic attribute of our Almighty Lord and Savior. Simply put- no matter what changes in us, for us, around us, God does not change. Our vision might struggle to see that goodness amidst darkness. The light still shines. We might believe that light shines, yet never see it with our two eyes. Either way- that light remains the same.

The Celts were on to something with their bonfire to hearth ritual. They carried that sacred light into their homes, much like we carry the light of Christ into the world with us wherever we go. That light does not change. The Reformers believed that light was accessible to all God's people all the time, with no condition except faithful acceptance of Christ. Sometimes it just seems to be hidden in plain sight... the promise we trust and believe from beginning to end, through each new beginning in life, is that it's always there; we may not even have to look very hard to find it, and we certainly don't need to fix ourselves to see it. If we can just accept the love of Christ's eternal goodness in our hearts, it's a lot easier to see it's constant shine.

With peace and much love in Christ,  
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