



**FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT
SUNDAY, MARCH 22ND, 2020**

Becoming Truly Human and Christian: The Problem of ‘Apple Eating’



“I’ve never seen such a bunch of apple-eaters” JD Salinger, *Nine Stories*

The Gospel reading today is the third in a series that come to us from the Gospel of John. The order has been, Nicodemus (Lent 2) The Woman at the Well (Lent 3) and now the Blind Man. Each in this trilogy is important, because each depicts a response to Jesus, with varying degrees of adequacy. Of the three, it is the Blind Man and only the Blind Man who sees most clearly, who actually sees both physically and metaphysically. It is he who understands that Jesus is the Son of God. To use the metaphor of a couple of weeks ago, he sees with two eyes, with breadth *and* depth.

What also stands out in this reading of the Blind Man, is the issue of “sin”. It is a word that in secular circles, even Christian ones, causes embarrassment these days: it seems uncouth, unsophisticated, surely, we have moved beyond it. The point however is not so much that we have moved beyond it, but that we need to move beyond our childish understanding of the term and to interpret it as adults, not as Sunday-School children. In this story of the Blind Man, Jesus takes the term from the vocabulary of the religious heavy-weights, turns it on its head, and re-casts it as a key word in his lexicon for explaining the weight of oppression

GATHERING

Welcome

In the name of the Father
In the name of the Son
In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

We light the paschal candle

Let's Sing: Sing of the Lord's Goodness (TiS 183, The Lord's Goodness, Ernest Sands)

A Meditation Upon the Secret of Living

In this meditation, I try to get at the essence of the Gospel reading for today, concerning Jesus' reading of human beings: where we go wrong, where our Achilles' heel is ultimately located. For Jesus, it lies in our rejection of others, our objectification of them as 'sinners' or something akin. For Jesus, the sinner never refers to those people or groups of people who communities scapegoat as guilty in some way or another. Indeed, Jesus looks for a way out of that disastrous impasse through giving expression to the initiative of God's generosity. So, if there is a sinner at all, it is the one who *does* the scapegoating, especially when justified in God's name. We are invited to move beyond to a new way of being.

Judging, condemning and affixing blame
"Who sinned – this man or his parents?",
as if establishing moral symmetry is the crucial task.
But is it not
to heal the afflicted, to bring sight
to blind eyes and give new strength to the weak,
new beginnings to life where only the bleak

shadows of death once had been?
Maybe spend
less time following our 'straight-line' logic,
who's at fault and end
debates about sin.

Better to think about the 'curved-line' logic of Jesus,
about restoration and liberation.

***So, he takes clay, the dirt
from which we are made, spits, makes mud, applies
the raw mixture to the born-blind man's eyes,***

has him wash. And the beggar is made new:
he sees! Imagine the new vision, the dazzle of hue
and shape and texture; miraculous songs
of colour, of movement; the faces long
guessed-at now plain to see— the world reborn for him.
Some things still take time to become less dim
(like the blindness of prejudice in those
who knew him) but see how this poor man grows

in boldness and faith: an inspiration
to all who know that the new creation
is often grown into a bit at a time.
Jesus brings us new sight: new heart and mind,
but sometimes it's slowly we understand, only slowly
and we don't always have all answers at hand.

***And I am blind clay, unable to see
until you, O Lord, re-mud, re-make me.***

Peace

Lent Event

We listen to Petrus and Nyoman from Ambon about the reconstruction and healing
of religious, cultural and economic hatreds

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Anecdotes about Sin and Sinning (Apple-Eating)

I've never seen such a bunch of apple-eaters.”

J.D. Salinger, *Nine Stories*

The greatest temptations are not those that solicit our consent to obvious sin, but those that offer us great evils masking as the greatest goods.”

Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*

The cross solved our problem by first revealing our real problem, our universal pattern of scapegoating and sacrificing others. The cross exposes forever the scene of our crime.”

Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*

All sins are attempts to fill voids.

Simone Weil

I believe that is what the God experience does for us. It calls us beyond our limits into the fullness of life - into a capacity to love people we are not taught to love - and into an ability to be who we are. **John Shelby Spong**

The straight line belongs to people, the curved line to God,

Antoni Gaudí – “God’s Architect”

1 Samuel 16:1-13 (New English Translation)

The passages set for today, especially the Old Testament and John 9:1-41, induct us into the strange economy of God’s kingdom. In John 9 the one born blind comes to sight in more ways than one and those who have not only physical sight but insight in other ways are seen to be blind. And in Samuel, God chooses as king the one least likely – the least significant, the one forgotten. This strange economy comes to its fullness in the events of Easter where, contrary to all expectations, death gives way to life and mourning is turned to dancing.

Today’s passage is the beginning of a long section (1 Samuel 16 – 2 Samuel 5) often called ‘the history of David’s rise’. It tells the story of how David, described in his youth as both shepherd and musician, rises in Saul’s court, flees to save his life, lives as a mercenary and, in the end, succeeds Saul as king. 1 Sam 16:1-13 speaks of the ‘transfer’ of the spirit from Saul to David. It is brought about by Saul’s disobedience (1 Sam 15:1-9). The Lord regrets having made Saul king (15:10, 35) and rejects him (15:26). The ‘transfer’ is complete in 16:14 with the departure of the ‘spirit of the Lord’ from Saul.

16 The LORD said to Samuel, “How long do you intend to mourn for Saul? I have rejected him as king over Israel.^[a] Fill your horn with olive oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse in Bethlehem, for I have selected a king for myself from among his sons.”^[b]

² Samuel replied, “How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me!” But the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you^[c] and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’”³ Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you should do. You will anoint for me the one I point out^[d] to you.”

⁴ Samuel did what the LORD told him.^[e] When he arrived in Bethlehem, the elders of the city were afraid to meet him. They^[f] said, “Do you come in peace?”⁵ He replied, “Yes, in peace. I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” So he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel^[g] noticed^[h] Eliab and said to himself,^[i] “Surely, here before the LORD stands his chosen king.”^[j]⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, “Don’t be impressed by^[k] his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. God does not view things the way people do.^[l] People look on the outward appearance,^[m] but the LORD looks at the heart.”

⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and presented him to Samuel.^[n] But Samuel^[o] said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.”⁹ Then Jesse presented^[p] Shammah. But Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.”¹⁰ Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel.^[q] But Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.”¹¹ Then Samuel asked Jesse, “Is that all the young men?” Jesse^[r] replied, “There is still the youngest one, but he’s taking care of the flock.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we cannot turn our attention to other things until he comes here.”

¹² So Jesse had him brought in.^[s] Now he was ruddy, with attractive eyes and a handsome appearance. The LORD said, “Go and anoint him. This is the one.” ¹³ So Samuel took the horn full of olive oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers. The Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day onward. Then Samuel got up and went to Ramah.

Psalm 23

The fourth Sunday in Easter is traditionally known as ‘Shepherd Sunday’ and Psalm 23 is set each year as the psalm for that day. There it is associated with other readings focusing on the theme of shepherd(ing), especially John 10. It is interesting this week to consider Psalm 23 in the context of Lent. It is not an unusual choice in that the theme of Psalm 23 is that of rest, comfort and security on a journey; a theme most appropriate for our ‘Lenten pilgrimage’

¹The LORD is my shepherd, ***I shall not want.***

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; ***he leads me beside still waters;***

³*he restores my soul.* **He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.**

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; ***your rod and your staff— they comfort me.***

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; ***you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.***

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, ***and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.***

Ephesians 5:8-14

To walk in the light is not about being happy, nor is it about mystical ascent or spiritual elevation, although to be able to sustain living this way does require spiritual depth. In essence, walking in the light is about owning a commitment to justice and embracing a stance of compassion for all human beings. We are still very good at hiding injustices or hiding ourselves from them, much to our shame. They extend from sexual abuse and exploitation to downright poverty and victimisation of the weak and disempowered. The last verse is an illusion to baptism: it means saying no to exploitation and yes to love, represented in and made possible through Jesus

.⁸For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

The word of the Lord'

Thanks be to God

John 9:1-41 (The Message)

This is a profound piece of literature but also potentially quite dangerous. It is profound because of the way it deals with the question of the nature of human beings and religious systems, both of which have the capacity to initiate and be complicit in destructiveness – what Jesus understands as sin. But it is also dangerous, because of the way this reading and more broadly John's Gospel targets Judaism and the Jews as enemies, and later on “children of the devil”, something which in retrospect fuelled anti-Semitism in the early, medieval and modern church up till World War II. In this reading, we get a sense of that as we hear the opposition between the blind man, a new Jewish convert to Jesus, now a Christian, and the “sons of Abraham”, members of the synagogue. The historical context of John's Gospel, where the Christians, probably in what is now modern Turkey, were expelled from the synagogues in the latter part of the 1st century, stripping them of legal protections afforded by the Roman state, explains but does not justify, the antipathy the new Jewish Christians felt to their former brothers and sisters. We need to read John's Gospel with discernment, aware of the way in which historical hatreds die hard.

9 ¹⁻²Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?”

³⁻⁵ Jesus said, “You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect

here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world's Light."

⁶⁻⁷ He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man's eyes, and said, "Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam" (Siloam means "Sent"). The man went and washed—and saw.

⁸ Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, "Why, isn't this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?"

⁹ Others said, "It's him all right!"

But others objected, "It's not the same man at all. It just looks like him."

He said, "It's me, the very one."

¹⁰ They said, "How did your eyes get opened?"

¹¹ "A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' I did what he said. When I washed, I saw."

¹² "So, where is he?"

"I don't know."

¹³⁻¹⁵ They marched the man to the Pharisees. This day when Jesus made the paste and healed his blindness was the Sabbath. The Pharisees grilled him again on how he had come to see. He said, "He put a clay paste on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see."

¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "Obviously, this man can't be from God. He doesn't keep the Sabbath."

Others countered, "How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things like this?" There was a split in their ranks.

¹⁷ They came back at the blind man, “You’re the expert. He opened *your* eyes. What do you say about him?”

He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ The Jews didn’t believe it, didn’t believe the man was blind to begin with. So, they called the parents of the man now bright-eyed with sight. They asked them, “Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he now sees?”

²⁰⁻²³ His parents said, “We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. But we don’t know how he came to see—haven’t a clue about who opened his eyes. Why don’t you ask him? He’s a grown man and can speak for himself.” (His parents were talking like this because they were intimidated by the Jewish leaders, who had already decided that anyone who took a stand that this was the Messiah would be kicked out of the meeting place. That’s why his parents said, “Ask him. He’s a grown man.”)

²⁴ They called the man back a second time—the man who had been blind—and told him, “Give credit to God. We know this man is an impostor.”

²⁵ He replied, “I know nothing about that one way or the other. But I know one thing for sure: I was blind . . . I now see.”

²⁶ They said, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

²⁷ “I’ve told you over and over and you haven’t listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples?”

²⁸⁻²⁹ With that they jumped all over him. “*You* might be a disciple of that man, but we’re disciples of Moses. We know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from.”

³⁰⁻³³ The man replied, “This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! It’s well known that God isn’t at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does his will.

That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of—ever. If this man didn't come from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything."

³⁴ They said, "You're nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!" Then they threw him out in the street.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him. He asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

³⁶ The man said, "Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him."

³⁷ Jesus said, "You're looking right at him. Don't you recognize my voice?"

³⁸ "Master, I believe," the man said, and worshiped him.

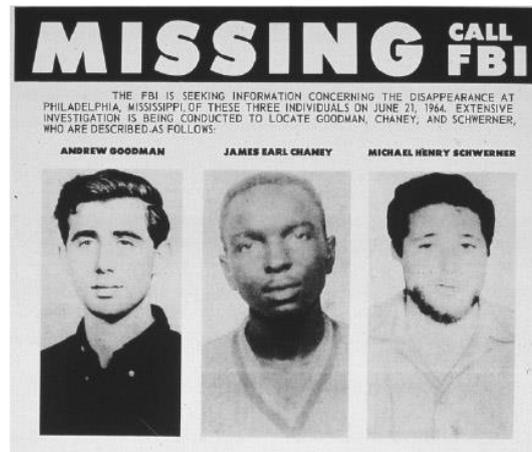
³⁹ Jesus then said, "I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretence of seeing will be exposed as blind."

⁴⁰ Some Pharisees overheard him and said, "Does that mean you're calling us blind?"

⁴¹ Jesus said, "If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure."

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Christ

A Film Clip: “Mississippi Burning”, 1988



In the summer of 1964, three university students, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner and James Chaney, were arrested in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and taken to Neshoba County Jail. The three young men had been working on the Freedom Summer Campaign to register African Americans to vote. They were interrogated and then ‘released’ They were never seen alive again. Within days, federal agents descended upon the area to investigate their deaths. Two months later, their bodies were discovered, riddled with bullets, under an earthen dam. In our clip, we listen in to a conversation between two FBI agents who lead the investigation: Agent Alan Ward (Willem Dafoe) and Agent Rupert Anderson (Gene Hackman). In it Anderson explains to Ward what it means to be a poor white living in the South, with the words, “*If you ain’t better than a Nigger son, then who are you better than*”?

(18:25 -20:50)

Some thoughts...about “apple eaters”

Let’s Give

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Sacrament of the Eucharist

In the light of the current circumstances we will take the sacrament
in what is referred to as “one-kind”, receiving the bread alone

**Song: The Lord is my Shepherd (TiS 659, My Shepherd,
Broan Boniwell)**

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Lift up your hearts

We lift them to the Lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

It is right to give our thanks and praise

With all we are, we give you glory,
Trinity of love, the one and Holy God,
Sovereign of all time and space.

We celebrate this wide, red land,
for its rugged beauty,
its changing seasons,
for its diverse peoples,
and for all that lives upon this fragile earth.

You have called us to be Church in this place,
to give voice to every creature under heaven.
We rejoice with all that you have made,
as we join the company of heaven in their song

(We sing)

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.***

***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna
in the highest***

To Adam and Eve, you gave the world and its wonders,
But we misused your gift of freedom.
We bless you for your mercy,
For you never cease to call our restless hearts until they find
rest in you.
Again and again you raise up men and women to speak your
word, to guide, to challenge and to convert.

At the last Father,
You sent Jesus Christ,
Child of your love, God with us.
Born as one of us,
He lived our life and died our death,
Offering us both now and forever,
Eternal life with you.

Through him, in him and because of him,
We affirm the Church's faith

***Christ has died.
Christ has risen.
Christ will come again.***

Institution

Lord's Prayer

Let us say the Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.***

***Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.***

Deliver us Lord from every evil,
and grant us peace in our day.
In your mercy, keep us free from sin
and protect us from all anxiety
as we wait in joyful hope
for the coming of our Saviour.

Breaking of the Bread

Christ is the bread of joy
Who shares food with sinners.

Christ is the cup of life,
Who revives the faint-hearted

Let us receive what we are;
Let us become what we receive

Lamb of God

Jesus, Wisdom of God,
have mercy on us

Jesus, Word made flesh,
have mercy on us

Jesus, Liberator of creation
grant us peace.

Communion

Distribution.

Prayer after Communion

God of heaven and earth,
you make us one in Christ.
Inspire us with new vision
and the wisdom of ancient dreams.
Give us strength to walk together
In Christ's name
Amen

Prayers of the People

The one who prays, ends each petition with the words, "may we see our own brokenness" and the people respond, "rather than the brokenness of others".

Hymn: Here in this Place (TIS 474, Gather Us In, Marty Haugen)

Blessing

May we live,

tenaciously *bending toward life*,
confronting our brokenness.
May we discern the spirits
May we read the signs of the times
And channel our desire for *Christ's* purposes

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ
Amen

We Sing: Nothing can Trouble (TiS 739)

Closing Postlude