

Lent 4 A 2011

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

In the lexicon of salvation

There is no citation more compelling than this:

I once was lost,

But now I'm found –

Was blind, but now I see.

If you want to know what it means

To move from death to life,

To move from emptiness to fullness,

To find meaning,

To enter into peace,

This is the simplest way to describe it

That I know.

I once was lost,

But now I'm found –

Was blind,

But now I see.

And, I have come to see,

There is no more compelling witness

To this power of God

To bring new life

Out of a dead end

than the man born blind.

In the life-changing encounter

With Jesus he becomes a person

Of courage and conviction.

In him we see the journey

From victim to free and fearless witness.

This is a story

That moves

from a locked down and limited view of the world

To a vision of hope.

It moves from a false certainty

That our suffering

Grows out of our faults
Into a revelation –
God can bring life
Out of anything.

Imagine living in a world
Where everything was your fault.
Then again,
Perhaps you don't have to imagine.
Perhaps you've been there.
A world where someone looks at you,
At the facts of your life,
And says any one of a number of things.
Things like this:
Personally, I blame the parents.
If only they had known.
Of course, you have to make allowances.
They say it's genetic,
But I always think that if you have enough willpower,
You can overcome these things.

All of these, that you may or may not have heard,
All of these are summed up
In the question of the hapless disciples,
Always bumbling along
Asking
what we believe
we would never have been foolish enough
To ask.

Rabbi, who sinned,
This man or his parents,
That he was born blind?

We think we know better than to ask a question like this.
But how often,
Even when we do know better than to ask a question like this
About another,
Do we ask it of ourselves?

What did I do wrong?
If only I had done this,
Or not done that,
Or worked harder

Or been more loving.
Then blindness would not have come upon me;
I would not have gotten lost.

Into the middle of this mess
Into the middle of a world
Where too many people believe
The facts of our lives come from sin
Jesus comes,
Saying what we would never dare to say.

We like to think that all questions are valid;
In fact in a community like this
That's an article of faith.
We believe that questions are the answer.
But some questions,
It turns out,
Lead us down a path
That turns out to be a dead end.

Who sinned?
Whose fault is it that something bad happened?
Much as I would like to believe
That all questions are worthwhile,
I have come to believe
This question is wrong.

Who sinned,
To make something bad happen?

Once you start on a path like this,
There is no way out,
Or so it seems,
Until Jesus comes along
And shows us the way.

Jesus breaks into the dead end
And makes a way.

It's not about sin,
He tells the disciples.
It's about the power of God.

Who can say who is,

And who is not, a sinner?
Is that up to us?
If sin is separation from God,
Who but God can say
If we are separated
From the source of our lives?
Who but God,
And perhaps we ourselves?
Can others know
Unless we tell them?

Too often the answer has been yes.
Too many people have decided who is sinful
And why.
But the man born blind,
brought into the light by the light of the world,
Learns to discern what is,
And what is not,
The real question.

I do not know whether this man is a sinner,
He says.
All I know is that I was blind,
And now I see.

All I know is that when I met him,
The promises of God
That the prophets dared to speak,
The recovery of sight to the blind,
The ingathering of all the outcasts,
The coming of the reign of God,
All these promises came to life
In my own body.

Who would care to talk about sin
When you could live in the promise instead?

It takes courage to turn away from talk of sin
And speak instead of walking in the light.
The man born blind,
Who began to see,
Shows us the way.

It is up to us to follow.

If we have come to see,
If we have come to find a way,
How will we let it show?

How, like the man born blind,
Will we learn to speak with courage and conviction
Turning our eyes away
From those who would focus on sin
And looking instead to the new life
That we have been given?

There is always a place,
More than one place,
Where we can turn our eyes.

There is always a place
Where we can speak with conviction,
Turning the questions about sin
Into a chance to speak of life and strength and healing.

Right now, to me,
One of those places is the failure of the civil unions bill.
We faced a disappointment
This past week –
Those of us who wait for the day
When equal rights and equal responsibilities
In public and private life
Will be granted to gay men and lesbians.

We still live in a world
Where some are in
And some are out,
And where too many people
Make a judgment about who's in and who's out
Based on the question,
Who sinned?

In Jesus' day,
Those with physical disabilities
Were left out.
We would never dream of that now –
At least officially.

We would never dream of claiming now
That a physical disability
Was a sign of sin,
Individual or corporate.
We would never dream of making an argument like that
In the cause of leaving out some members of the human family.

Except that we still do.
There are still those who claim
That what we recognize
As normally occurring variations
In human sexuality
Are a result of sin.

This past week,
A simple bill granting gay men and lesbians the right
To contract civil unions
Failed to get out of committee.

Why?

I can only think that the bill
Failed to get out of committee
Because some who had the power to move it on
Were preoccupied
With questions of sin.

This grieves me deeply.
And I don't want to get stuck there.

It would be easy right now, I suspect,
For us in this particular community
To get worked up into a passion of self righteousness.
I can feel how good that would feel.
So I'm reminding myself
To remember
the very natural tendency to blame and leave out
Those who blame and leave us out,
To speak of the sinfulness of those
Who call us sinful.

Perhaps we are still stuck
Back with the Pharisees,
Believing we should be speaking of sin –

All of us, on every side of the issue.

I think, even for us,
Who are disappointed and grieved and angry,
Even as we work and wait for justice
There is an opportunity for humility,
And even repentance.
Perhaps we can look for the blind spots in our own lives,
Places of prejudice and judgment
And hardness of heart,
And ask,
Where is the hurt place in me that needs healing,
So that I too, like the man born blind,
Can walk away from all the blather,
The endless pointless questions,
And find the one who offers life.

Am I stuck on the question of sin,
When I could be living in the power of God?

When the gospel stories come true
In our own lives,
When we stop asking the blaming questions
And claim instead
The power of God to bring life
Anywhere, out of anything,
Then we become free and fearless witnesses,
Who love to tell the story,
I once was lost,
But now am found,
Was blind,
but now I see.