

“Somewhere Even the Blind Can See”
Genesis 28:11-16; Mark 10:46-52; Prov. 29:18
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All Saints Sunday

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There aren't a lot of hymns that choke me up but one that does a pretty good job is *“In This Very Room.”* Some of you may know it by heart: It has the force of scripture:

*In this very room there's quite enough love for one like me,
and in this very room there's quite enough joy for one like me;
and there's quite enough hope,
and quite enough pow'r
to chase away any gloom,
for Jesus, Lord Jesus, is in this very room.*

I'm not sure why this song has such power. I think it has to do with the desire we all have to experience God in the church, in the world, and in our personal lives.

Jacob, the Old Testament Patriarch, certainly felt God's presence. One night he fell asleep and dreamed of angels ascending and descending a ladder. While asleep, Jacob received God's covenant that God would continue the work God began with Jacob's Grandpa Abraham and his Father Isaac, to make Israel a great nation. So moved was Jacob by this vision, the next morning Jacob confesses his former blindness: *“Surely the Lord is in this place and I didn't know it.”* A lot like *“In This Very Room.”* How often has God been with us and we didn't know it? We get so enslaved by life's demands we become blind to God's presence.

The other day I was telling René that we're like Israel wandering in the wilderness. René retorted, “What do you mean—the wilderness? We're still in Egypt!”

It was an “Aha!” moment for me; because if we were in the wilderness we'd have more of a sense we're on our way somewhere; but Egypt is a dead end place, where everything seems to have stopped or even started going backwards. Every

single one of us is so enslaved to the Egypt of our daily chores and the world's charms we can't see the kingdom of God right in front of our faces! We've become so enraptured by the allures of the Egypt all around us we no longer see God's kingdom in our very midst! Oh, we may occasionally have "*In This Very Room*" moments when we feel our hearts touched by angels. But more and more, we feel like Jacob, wandering around in such a Zombie-like fog we can't discern whether we're spiritually dead or alive. *The Lord is very much in this very place but we don't know it!*

We're like Mark's disciples in our second passage; or to put it more accurately Mark's "DUH-sciples." Throughout Mark's Gospel they never quite figure out who Jesus is. But Blind Bartimaeus does, which of course, raises the question who is really blinder: the disciples or Bartimaeus?

But this is precisely Mark's point! The "DUH-sciples can see with the eyes in their head, all right. Their vision is perfectly 20-20 in seeing the world as it is and resigning themselves to its constraints. But it's the only thing they see. They are so blinded by the world before them they neither see the Messiah nor His kingdom. They are inflicted with spiritual cataracts. But "Blind" Bartimaeus (his first name may as well be "Blind") "sees" immediately that he is in the presence of this special rabbi from Nazareth! And so, he cries out as loudly as he can to gain Jesus' attention.

Here's the irony: Bartimaeus, already with spiritual insight, gains his physical sight; but the Duh-sciples with their physical sight, remain spiritually blind. This may be why Mark never records the Risen Jesus ever appearing to the 12. Mark figures, that even if the Risen Jesus had appeared to them, they still wouldn't see him and get it!

This remains true for many Christians today, who often see nothing except the world in all its harshness. In a world so full of superficiality and people on the

take, it's easy to see people *only* as people, not as creatures made in the image of God. We see enemies as *less than* human, and never as fellow children of God who sometimes have a hard word of truth to tell we'd rather not hear. It's so hard to believe that "Earth's crammed with heaven; and every common bush afire with God!"¹

Think of the Man of La Mancha, Don Quixote, who tilts at windmills he thinks are dragons. Through his vision, he sees what no one else sees: he sees the hopes and possibilities. Like the barmaid Aldonza he renames his longed for Lady Dulcinea. Only after much persuasion and with Don Quixote on his deathbed does Aldonza understand what Don Quixote is all about: not the world as it is, but the world as it might be, as she might be. Finally, she accepts Quixote's vision of her as his Lady Dulcinea and sees herself and what she might become through his eyes! This is what God wants for us: to see ourselves as God does, with all our possibilities!

Theologian Paul Tillich remarks, "We live in two orders. There is the order of history, an order of growing and dying, of sin and punishment, of the tragic law which ordains that human greatness utterly fall." This is St. Augustine's *City of Man*. But there is also "the order beyond the order of history, the divine order. And it is paradoxical: people are like grass, but the word of God spoken to them shall stand forever. People stand under the law of sin and punishment, but the divine order breaks through it and brings forgiveness. People faint, falling from the height of their moral goodness and youthful power, and just when they have fallen and are weakest, they run without weariness and rise up with wings like eagles. God acts beyond all human assumptions and valuations. God acts surprisingly, unexpectedly, paradoxically."² This is Augustine's *City of God*.

As another writer puts it: "We live in 2 worlds: the one that is, and the one that might be. Nothing is ordained for us: neither delight nor defeat, neither peace

nor war. Life flows and we must freely choose.”³ Until now we may have thought we had but one choice: to live with the world that is. There is no world that might be. The disciples knew only the world that is. But Bartimaeus knew of a world that might be! He saw that world in Jesus. Quixote saw that world in Aldonza. It is a world born of imagination or what biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann’s calls “prophetic imagination.”

Imagination is the key to opening our eyes and seeing God’s might be already unfolding in our midst! Einstein once remarked that “Imagination is more important than knowledge.”⁴ “The most beautiful thing we can experience,” he said, “is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.”⁵

When I was in 1st Grade I asked my mother a question that dramatically changed my life. I asked her if there was supposed to be 2 or 3 of everything I saw. My question set an alarm off in her. Very soon I found myself at the ophthalmologist getting my eyes checked. The eye doctor immediately recognized my ailment. I had “Lazy eye,” technically called “amblyopia.” That diagnosis led to nearly 9 years of intensive eye therapy.

Little did I realize then, the upside of having seen 2 or 3 of everything at such an early stage in my life! I discovered long before I understood the principle, that there is such a thing as an alternative world, an alternative future, a second vision, of what the world might look like and be. Years and many religion and seminary classes later I learned that we don’t have to settle for the world as it is. There is another vision, the Jews call “*shalom*” and we Christians call “the kingdom of heaven,” “the kingdom of God,” “a new heaven and a new earth.” This vision was never meant just for another day or even for only eternity, but for now. No one need settle for the world as it presents itself to us. There are all kinds

of impossible possibilities where what is impossible for us remains possible for God; among these peace with justice in our world!

These days it's easy to get down in the dumps and say the world is going to hell in a hand basket! And who knows? Maybe it is!

But there are worse things we can be than hopeful pessimists. We can believe, and perhaps ought to believe things can get worse. But as Christians we are not limited to current events or personal setbacks. Our Christian lives are not confined to any Egypt or any spiritual prison we or society may build. Paul's letters from prison, Bonhoeffer's, Ghandi's and Mandela's letters from prison, and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" tell us the human spirit cannot be bound when it is rooted in Christ.

Our secret? The resurrection of Jesus Christ who conquered death with love and hope and joy beyond imagination or explanation! This is God's gospel truth. This is our promise. This is our message to the world. We can see beyond the pitiful state of the world to God's land of promise. We can know God is "*In This Very Room*" and in this very world and in our very lives.

It is true, "Days pass and years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles." But our prayer? "Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing; let there be moments when the lightning of your Presence illumines the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed. And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness and exclaim in wonder: How filled with awe is this place, and we did not know it! Blessed is the Eternal One, the holy God."⁶ Amen.

¹"Omnipresence," *Gates of Prayer*, NY: American Conference of Rabbis, 1979, p. 658

²Paul Tillich, "We Live in Two Orders," *The Shaking of the Foundations*, NY: Scribners & Sons, 1948, pp. 17-19ff.

³*Gates*, p. 231.

⁴Albert Einstein, *Cosmic Religion*, 1931.

⁵Einstein, *The World As I See It*, 1949.

⁶*Gates*, p. 373.