

Sermon for 4/3/11
Lent 4A, Canterbury Sunday

Too often I judge others. I hear what they say or see what they do or hear about what they do and I condemn them as worthless maggots. Too often I criticize my neighbors. I can list their faults and failures with ease.

However, when I self-critique, I find few of my own faults and failures. I am blind to myself. I do not know who I am. And if I cannot fathom the stretches of my own soul, how can I could I ever perceive a part of another's existence?

I am like the Pharisees; I cannot shift my understanding of sin beyond my own biases and ignorance. I have judged strangers, friends, and family just as the Pharisees judged the blind man. Judgment of others is a poison in my life. It sickens me and takes away my sight. I am blind to how others have taken their inadequacies and worked past them and grown into beautiful, strong beings. In my illness I cannot comprehend their metamorphosis because on the surface they are the same. I stare at the superficial, but I cannot even glance at their spirit because I lack the maturity and the grace to forget my past judgments and forgive people's faults. However, when my own shortcomings are revealed, I always expect forgiveness and understanding for my mistakes. If I want myself to be forgiven by others, I must forgive those who forgave me.

Sometimes a person's flaws are just flaws. They will never change like the imperfections in a diamond will never change. It is in our nature to be flawed. Yet, if we hold each other in the right light, pure light, unclouded by bias and judgment we will free our sight to perceive how we all were created as children of God.

The son of God reveals the blind man as a person whose flaw is without sin. He does not judge the man for a factor beyond his control. The messiah notices what no one not even those who have studied the books of Moses and the books of the prophets all of their lives can see. The son of man does good works for the sake of a good God. Not when it is convenient or only for those who God has graced with wealth and power in this world, but rather to those who have been looked down upon all their lives by the rest of society. Jesus befriends those who have been alienated by their community: the crippled, the blind, the lepers, the women, and the children. The son of man respects the laws of Moses as long as they respect the sanctity of life. The messiah is the spirit of the law: the word made flesh. Jesus may not follow all customary meal traditions, but he is our bread of life and cup of salvation. The Lord has formed a new convent, and Jesus is its bearer. He has descended from heaven to deliver us from evil and offer us a new mode of life and worship.

Where is this new mode of life? Where is the Kingdom of God? Paul expected the second coming of Christ before his death. What happened? Did Jesus not predict this evil generation would fall before the Kingdom of God?

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If Jesus is to be interrupted as an imminent apocalyptic, then his prophecy was wrong as evidenced by us being here together two thousand years later. However, early Christianity was a diverse group with many different beliefs about Jesus. Some beliefs have died out and those that survived have evolved as Christianity has changed. What we proclaim today as the gospel may not agree with all early Christian conceptions of who the son of man was. Many times they did not even agree with each other. However, the spirit of the good news has not been lost over the past two thousand years. The messiah's commandments to love on another as we love ourselves and to believe through him to receive salvation are universal ideas that cut across history and cultures. Belief is the true Kingdom of God, the true key to eternal life.

We all have come together as believing Christians today. We all are participating in eternal life together. Yet, this life will soon be gone, and I rarely find it peaceful or holy. When I pick up the New York Times, I do not see mankind progressing to a utopian brotherhood, but rather explosions and death across the middle east and a natural disaster ripping apart Japan. Why does an omnipotent God turn a blind eye to our suffering?

To quote *The Princess Bride*, "Life is pain." Imagine if all that we ate tasted sweet. All food was sugar except we maintained a balanced diet. Would cookies and ice cream still be delicious or would they taste just like every other meal including salad. We would not appreciate dessert; we would not even taste the difference. If all of life was a continuum of happiness and joy, we would become apathetic to experiences we treasure the most. A man who lives all his life in the rainforest cannot evaluate how totally surrounded by nature he is. But a man who has lived his whole life in the desert will be fascinated by the soaring trees whose canopies block out the sun, tiny ants who form huge masses to devour plants, and the exotic predators who lurk in the shadows. If all I see is red then I can never comprehend yellow. If we never feel anger or depression, we can never know peace or ecstasy. The sourness of suffering makes satisfaction sweet.

If you seek to live in a world without pain and suffering, then you will find a utopia of stagnant existence. Your brain will receive a single stimulus. Your life will be unstimulated and unchallenged. An existence without failure and anguish is not existence at all. God has created us not to float by and piddle around, but to accomplish meaning and purpose. Everyone's meaning and purpose is up to themselves to judge. We are not born of sin but born of God and fall into sin though our own failures. Yet, I welcome failure. I learn from my mistakes not my victories. Suffering helps me appreciate the triumphs of life. Pain makes me grow stronger so that I can accomplish what I need to do. And I am happy to live and suffer along side everyone here.

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