

---

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 10:46-52

How many Episcopalians does it take to change a light bulb? What do you mean *change*? For the most part, we human beings do not like change. We want to know what is what and who is who. Change challenges us. Many people associate change with judgment. What was wrong with the old way? Was it not good enough? The writer of Hebrews was dealing with a change. Hebrews appears to have been written at a time when the third generation of Christians was coming into being. These were people who had grown up thinking of themselves as Christians rather than as Jews. At the same time, near the end of the First Century, Judaism was making a resurgence after the defeat in the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. Change was very much in the air.

How were Christians supposed to understand the Old Testament and classical Judaism? For some, the change was forced upon them. The Temple had been the center of worship. It was gone. How do we continue? For others, they chose a change. Having heard the good news of God in Christ, they joined in the community of the followers of the Way. Still others had been born into Christianity and never knew anything else. So if there had been this monumental change because of the in-braking of Christ into the world, what did it mean? Things were different, but how?

Some taught that the Old Testament should be disregarded; it had nothing to do with the Christ and the God revealed in him. This was the argument of a guy named Marcion. He taught that the Hebrew God was not the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Marcion was condemned as a heretic; rightfully so, I would say. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the same God who is the Father of Jesus Christ.

Others reduced the Hebrew Scriptures to little more than a source of illustrations and a book of prophecies always pointing, directly or indirectly, to Christ. This is the position in John's gospel. The writer of John is careful to maintain that the old order was nevertheless something given by God and never disparages it. It is just no longer in force. The writer of Hebrews takes a more nuanced approach. The revelation of Jesus as the Christ does not do away with the Law and the prophets but fulfills them. Christianity is not shaking an Etch-a-Sketch, wiping the slate clean. Instead, it is the culmination of centuries of development. Christianity is not a correction to Judaism, it is the perfecting of the promises made through Judaism.

The writer of Hebrews does not say it was wrong for priests to offer sacrifices for sins, both their own and for others. Instead he is arguing that Christ fulfills that role to perfection. Those who came before were not misguided, but they were not finished. Christ finished the work of salvation. In him, the process was made complete. That is why there is no longer a need for any other high priest. We have the perfect one in Jesus Christ. This was not change to correct; it was change to complete.

---

Still, change requires a pastoral touch. In our Gospel reading, our Lord Jesus gives sight to Blind Bartimaeus. An intrinsically good thing, right? But then does that not imply that there is something inherently wrong with being blind? Certainly in First-Century Palestine, being blind was a very real handicap. Almost inevitably, the blind were relegated to beggar status. What else *could* the blind do? In that context, being blind was an inherently bad thing. There was little or no attempt to make it possible for the blind to fit into society any better than as beggars by the gate. We have made great strides to make it possible for the visually impaired to integrate into the larger society more easily, but vestiges remain, especially in our language, in our idioms.

This past week, we took our daughter, Lucy, to the School for the Blind to have her annual evaluation done at the Low Vision Clinic there. The doctors and staff examine her eyes and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations for her at school and such. While we were there, we ran into an acquaintance who is visually impaired. As we were talking, I was cringing a bit because I was aware of the language we were using. This is not a political correctness thing, but an awareness of the presuppositions involved. “So nice to *see* you. Hope to *see* you again.” Granted, using one of the other senses would be either silly or creepy, depending upon the sense. “Can't wait to *smell* you again.” “I'm looking forward to *tasting* you.” Very *Silence of the Lambs*-y. And from the research I did, visually impaired folks are not generally offended by idioms like “See you later,” so I am not calling for us to change our language. But it has gotten me to thinking about our metaphorical use of blindness.

Much of it is based upon a time when a visually impaired person's ability to be part of the larger society was much more limited than it is now. Blindness was associated with the inability to recognize something obvious. I have never heard someone using the phrase, “the blind leading the blind” in a positive way. The upshot of all of this is that I have found it difficult to preach on Bartimaeus today. The usual metaphor is that Bartimaeus, though blind, is better able to “see” than the disciples. But that gets mixed in with the idea that there was something wrong with Bartimaeus before Jesus came along. The reality was that there was something wrong with Bartimaeus' society, not with Bartimaeus. Jesus restored Bartimaeus' sight, not because Bartimaeus needed healing, but because society did.

It has never occurred to me to wish that Lucy's sight would be better. She is who she is. She would not be a better person if her vision were better. She might have an easier time dealing with some situations, but the problem isn't with her. She is not deficient. She is not the one who needs to change. It is a shame that our reading today is so often seen as being one of healing blindness rather than extolling belief. “Blind Bartimaeus” we call him. Why not “Faithful Bartimaeus”? Or “Trusting Bartimaeus”? How about “Believing Bartimaeus”? That one has the advantage retaining the alliteration. Rather than centering on his physical change, what if we focus on his spiritual consistency?

---

I hope you will forgive me if I get a little philosophical here so late in the sermon, but change is really about the interplay of essence and accidents. These are terms used since Aristotle to denote the difference between a thing's appearance and its being. Whether a chair is made of wood or of metal has no bearing on its being a chair. The accidents are secondary to its essence. Changing the accidents, the appearance, of something is inconsequential when compared to changing its essence. A door is still a door whether it is green or red, for example. Its essence hasn't change. In fact, I would argue that really only accidents *change*, essences are *transformed*.

Instead of a succession of high priests who must continually offer sacrifice for both their sins and ours, the eternal high-priesthood of Jesus Christ transforms the essence of our relationship to God. The ability to see or not is secondary to our belief in the transforming power of Christ' love. May we seek to be more than merely changed. May we seek to be transformed. In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*