

The Artist's View – based on Ephesians 5: 8-14
Aspen Community UMC
March 2, 2008

Page 1 of 6

There is a story of a beggar who was sitting across the street from an artist's studio.

The artist saw him and thought he would make an interesting portrait study.

So, from a distance the artist painted the defeated man

whose shoulders drooped,

and whose eyes were downcast and sad.

When the artist was finished, he took the portrait over to the beggar

so he could look at it.

"Who is that?" the beggar questioned.

The painting bore a slight resemblance to himself,

but in the painting before him he saw

a person of dignity,

with squared shoulders

and bright uplifted eyes, almost handsome!

He asked the artist, "Is that me? I don't look like that."

But the artist replied,

"but that is the person I see in you."¹

Keep this in mind.

Paul is getting at something like this in the reading -

trying to communicate the work of the spirit

as it shines in our lives – think of a flashlight

and how it breaks through darkness.

What is darkness?

Darkness is the parts we don't see or don't want to see

but more than that – the darkness is also the unconscious parts of our lives.

What the light does is like what the artist does

in painting the portrait of the beggar -

for him to see.

What do we look like in divine light?

The Artist's View – based on Ephesians 5: 8-14
Aspen Community UMC
March 2, 2008

Page 2 of 6

Images of light and dark
were not only important images for ancient peoples – metaphorically.

They represented very real experience.

For when the sun went down on the streets of a city like Ephesus,
it was pitch black except for fires or candles in homes or meeting places.
I think of the commercial for Motel 6. Tom Bodet says, "We leave the light on for you."

And, for those who spent time in jail, as Paul did,
there was plenty of darkness, for there were no candles
no torches the prisoners could light - when night came.

And, yet, Paul's experience of the light,
Was that bright light on the road to Damascus.
It was his formative experience of the risen Christ.
He was blinded temporarily by a bright light.
So surely light always reminded him of his personal encounter with the risen Christ.
Light and darkness were important to Paul in a very visceral way.

Paul was trying to help readers – these new followers of Jesus in Ephesus
see how the experience of Christ
could be a way of putting new light, or being seen in a new light -
but, more than that, an opportunity to see themselves in new light
but not just that – it was to be lit with a new energy.

You see, they were under constant scrutiny,
constant criticism for this new religious practice.

Paul was trying to give them courage, to help them see themselves as
children of light – for light has been used so many times and places
in the ancient scriptures.

It represented the divine, it represented creation, it represented good.

The Artist's View – based on Ephesians 5: 8-14
Aspen Community UMC
March 2, 2008

Page 3 of 6

The community of people living at or near Qumran in about 300 BC called themselves children of the light. It was not new, just reinterpreted by Paul
maybe after his experience on the road -
after his experience of the Christ on the road.

Lent is a good time to think about this.

It is a time of introspection. It is a time of confession even communion,
as we will share today.

It is that time we admit that we have not loved God with our whole hearts,
nor loved our neighbors as ourselves.

Lent is a good time to think about what in our life needs some light shown on it
so we can see it better.

Lent is a good time to think about how -
we have not been as open even with ourselves -
about where we know we can grow -
which is another way to say we may be shortchanging ourselves,
and those people with whom we share our lives.

We don't fool the Divine. The Divine sees us as we are -
not as everyone else sees us.

We don't hide from that Divine light - for it finds us.

It engages us in searching our hearts and lives.

Consider a divine flashlight being shown into your life. Scary isn't it?

When it searches our lives, it finds things.

It finds our experiences and knows how we have interpreted those experiences.

What does it find in your life?

But consider for a minute, if you will, how you might
think of things that happen and how you reacted or responded to them
at an earlier time
and if anything could use a new interpretation.

The Artist's View – based on Ephesians 5: 8-14
Aspen Community UMC
March 2, 2008

Page 4 of 6

Again, think of things that have happened and how they have affected your life.

Can that divine light - shining into your life – that divine flashlight -
redeem and change how you live with them – how you interpret them -
and how you move into the future?

Fredrick Buechner writes:

People are prepared for everything except for the fact that beyond the darkness
of their blindness there is a great light.

They are prepared to go on breaking their backs plowing the same old field
until the cows come home without seeing,
until they stub their toes on it,

that there is a treasure buried in that field rich enough to buy Texas.

They are prepared for a God who strikes hard bargains but not
for a God who gives as much for an hour's work as for a day's.

They are prepared for a mustard-seed kingdom of God
no bigger than the eye of a newt, but not for the great banyan tree
it becomes with birds in its branches singing Mozart.

They are prepared for the potluck supper at First Presbyterian
but not for the feast set before them.²

Buechner is speaking to our blindness
and to the great light that we Christians call the Christ.

He is speaking to the possibilities we overlook
when we don't see it and live into it.

The divine shines the light of Christ into our lives
and things begin to look different.

The artist paints a picture of the beggar,
and the beggar looks different even to himself - than he did before.

The Artist's View – based on Ephesians 5: 8-14
Aspen Community UMC
March 2, 2008

Page 5 of 6

What would you look like - in a picture painted by the divine?

What would the divine light, the divine flashlight,
show in you that does not usually show?

There would be things that you would see more clearly.

It might be a talent or a skill you had paid little attention to.

It might be the ability to do something for your family
that you never thought you could do.

It might be something you never had considered that you could do for your community.

It might be a habit that needs to end because it gets in the way.

I might be hope. It might be joy.

Divine light can help us see ourselves in a different light.

It can help us see things we have not seen.

It can help us do things we have not done.

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As I read our scripture for today, these things come to mind.

I hope they represent the spirit of the text
in a way that is real for you today.

I hope they shine a light into your life
that shows you more of who you are before Christ,
as if Christ were the great artist, who has painted a portrait of you
and wants to give it to you.

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Page 6 of 6

¹ Brett Blair. Adapted from New Vision in Christ, by Rev. Michael J. Fish

² Adapted from Fredrick Buechner