

"Faith in 20/20 **Foresight**"

A meditation based on Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Psalm 34:1-8; Mark 10:46-52

October 25, 2009

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According to a Time magazine article, dated 1938, "a promising, extravagantly polite young scientist named John Warkentin" was busy studying the eyesight of various animals. Using a large revolving cylinder with alternating black and white stripes of diminishing widths, individual animals would be placed inside to see to what degree they followed the moving stripes. Based on the animal's movement, the scientist made presumptions about their eyesight. His testing revealed that:

- White rats, white mice and Gila monsters showed no response at all, and presumably have extremely poor vision
- Frogs, toads, alligators and opossums showed weak responses, and thus poor vision.
- Snakes, contrary to popular supposition, have good vision. Those tested included garter snakes, king snakes, ribbon snakes and rattlesnakes. They see worst just before shedding their skins, and best just after shedding, because the snake's cornea grows opaque as shedding time nears and is sloughed off with the skin.
- Turtles, woodchucks, guinea pigs, rabbits and gophers have good eyesight.
- Cats and birds see best of all.
- Guinea pigs and dogs vary greatly from one individual to another. Monkeys could not be tested because they kept peering curiously over the cylinder's top.

That was 1938. More recently, we benefit from Animal Planet, National Geographic, and numerous zoological societies that have taught us much about animal eyesight. As with we

humans, eyesight is based on what the particular animal needs to see in order to survive.

Hunting, being hunted, protecting one's family, access to food—all these are considerations that factor into an animal's ability to see.

And what of our eyesight? What do we need to see in order to survive? Theologian Robert McAfee Brown was fond of saying that what we see depends upon where we stand and what we hear is dependent upon to whom we are listening. Sounds simple! I recently went to the optometrist—time for my once every three years check-up and requisite new pair of glasses, helping me to see at a 20/20 vision level. Having 20/20 vision, with or without the help of glasses, does not mean that one has perfect vision. It only indicates the sharpness or clarity of vision at a distance of 20 feet. I will admit, with this new prescription, my vision is much more precise, much more clear. To see things sharply, with clarity of vision...ah, there is a skill we share with our animal companions on our journeys with them...and it is a skill much-needed in the world of spiritual journeys as well.

The psalmist, after eloquently speaking of praising God, blessing God, boasting (even) in God, sings more simply of seeking God and trusting God to deliver him or her from everything scary. As if talking from personal narrative, the psalmist quietly hums, "I sought God, and God answered me, and delivered me from all my fears... Look to God..." Then, the song takes an even more personal turn, "This poor soul cried, and was heard by God, and was saved from every trouble...God camps out around those of us who honor God and God's own angel delivers us...O taste and see that God is good..." We can only imagine what troubles and challenges the psalmist faced. An ending of a dear relationship? A major life disappointment? Bad grades? Death of a mother or father or sister or brother or favorite animal companion? Whatever sadness is the back story here, we can see with 20/20 vision the front story, and it is this: trust in God...look to God...taste and see that God is good! We are given a myriad of opportunities

each day to do just that. We have only to open our eyes to see that God is, indeed, good, very good.

Then there is our old friend Job. By the time of today's reading, God has harangued Job for four solid chapters, chiding him for his misplaced hubris, and, as I mentioned last week, putting Job in his place. As it turns out, that "place" was a place of boundless creativity, from which Job could see lofty mountain peaks, swim in refreshing babbling streams, and visit with all sorts of animals created by this ever-creative God. Here in the beauty of this garden, we can easily stand with Job on this one, and see life from his perspective. Everywhere we look, there is color and texture and something of interest, something about which someone here cares very much. From this view, we stop in our tracks, and repeat with our friend Job, "You know, God, I had heard of you, but now my eye sees you..."

Finally, on this day of sight, we meet in the gospel story a blind man by the name of Bartimaeus. At the beginning of the story, Bartimaeus is in his customary place as a disabled beggar in Jericho: he is out by the side of the road, out of the high-traffic area, marginalized by his lack of sight. When he hears that Jesus the healer is going by, he begins to shout for attention. The crowd attempts to shush Bartimaeus, to keep him in his customary, marginalized place where they can keep an eye on him, though he can see them not at all. But Jesus is not of the crowd, he is marginalized from them, and so calls for Bartimaeus to come and stand before him. Without benefit of sight, Bartimaeus seizes this opportunity to stand in a place where, what he comes to see is a direct result of the place in which he is standing.

"My teacher, let me see again," Bartimaeus asks of Jesus. And his simply-stated request is granted. Yet even before this miraculous regaining of sight, Bartimaeus, we are told, throws off his outer cloak, as if he knows before he sees, that he will see again. This outer cloak, to a beggar, is something he has needed for survival. His casting it aside is a sign of his trust, his faith in Jesus. Writing in *The Lectionary Commentary*, André Resner beautifully describes this

scene: "Faith sits, leaning forward, ready to leap at the opportunity to answer God's call whenever it might come, and it shows itself willing to shed whatever holds it back from the journey."

And so we cycle back to our animal companions and their eyesight. Remember the snake? No, not the one in the Garden of Eden...I'm referring to the ones studied by that young, up-and-coming scientist way back in 1938. All the snakes he tested—garter, garden, rattlers, kings, and ribbon—all of them saw the clearest just after shedding their skins. Perhaps the same is true for us humans. As we shed whatever encumbers, perhaps our vision improves. It certainly seemed to work for Job...as he let go of his obsession about the whys of human suffering, his vision cleared, and he could see the good that God was doing all around him. Though Job received neither satisfactory explanation or thoughtful analysis about suffering, what Job did receive was far greater...he received his sight, creatively transformed to see God more clearly than ever before. The same was true for our friend, Bartimaeus. Throwing away his one known possession, and thereby shedding his old marginalized begging self, Bartimaeus opened up some powerful energy, healing energy, that brought him sight and purpose and a new direction in life.

Mark Twain once quipped, "You cannot depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus." From today's scriptures, and looking around at our many animal companions, we can take inspiration from Mr. Twain's words. Today, we can shed whatever hinders us, and in so doing, we let loose the healing energy of our imaginations, and friends, when we do that, there is no limit to what we will be able to see!

Amen and Blessed Be!