

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost – Christina Smerick

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15; Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; I Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

I am inclined to a kind of blindness, a pessimistic one that keeps me imagining the world in my own image (and other people in my own image as well), rather than opening myself to God's imagination for the world and for us. I am blind like Zedekiah; and I am blind like the rich man; and I am blind like those who have wealth. In each biblical situation, someone has a serious case of God-blindness that severely limits their vision of the future, that keeps them from valuing what should be valued, that keeps their eyes on prizes not worth having. Fittingly, in my tiredness, it took me a while to see this, especially in the passage from Jeremiah. Honestly, and my mom can vouch for this, when I first read the passage, I was bored out of my skull. I thought that Jeremiah sounded like Grandpa Simpson, going on and on, repeating himself, telling some cockamamie story about a piece of land and a jug and whatnot. But no, of course not. Jeremiah is not Grandpa Simpson—if he seems to be rambling, you're probably spotting a narrative device (in this case, repetition) and missing the larger point. The situation Zedekiah and Jeremiah find themselves in is this: Babylon is at the gates. They have laid siege to Jerusalem and are starving the people out. This is the second time they've come, because the kings of Judah keep making then breaking promises to them—they keep making oaths with Egypt, trying to pick the winning side, and they have lost big time. N. is sick of it. Thus, Jeremiah is under house arrest for telling everyone to give in to the Babylonians and be spared; land, money, all is worthless at this point. So Jeremiah buying a plot of land, and making sure the deed is done properly, recorded properly, and is preserved for all time, is a bit like someone buying a house in the 9th Ward of New Orleans after Katrina. At the very least, bad timing. Anyone predicting the future of Judea at this point would likely be yelling 'sell sell', not 'buy buy'. Jeremiah himself is no Pollyanna—he's the one who has been predicting this horrible situation for years. So why, when it finally has come to pass, when the Babylonian crap has hit the Judean fan, is he BUYING LAND so that it stays in his family's possession for posterity? What posterity?

It's all about vision, isn't it? Jeremiah has it; Zedekiah doesn't. Jeremiah says that the Lord says, "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land." The land shall be redeemed and returned. God's vision for our future far exceeds our prognostications and our machinations. Jeremiah knows this, knows the heart of the Lord, and thus acts on that knowledge, not on the situation that is obvious to mortal man.

And the passage in Luke is one of vision as well. We are in the midst of a long series of passages from Luke about money. It is so well-timed with our COR 401 theme that I'm beside myself and am afraid of beating that horse to death. These passages bear careful reading, along with the passages from 1 Timothy, because they don't do what we want them to—not on

either side of the complex issue of Christians and money. Some of us really do want the wealthy to be condemned (forgetting, of course, that compared to the rest of the world, we are the wealthy); we want money to be the root of all evil. Others of us really want money to be a neutral thing—something we can and should do good with, something we are called to seek and produce, and therefore something that we can feel comfortable about possessing as Christians. And neither side is correct, dang it. It is love of money that is the root of all evil, not possession of money. And conversely, it is very difficult to be in possession of money and wealth and not be...blinded by it. The rich man is not condemned in this story for having wealth; he's condemned for being blinded by it, insulated by it so that he never even notices the poor man at his gates. The story is not one where the rich snub the poor, kick them, drive them from the gates. It's sadder than that, actually. The rich never even see the poor at all. Even when burning in fire, the rich man still treats Lazarus ("God has helped") as an errand boy—fetch me water, warn my brothers. The implication even is that this poor rich man did not know enough, was not shown what he needed to see in life, to know to care about the poor—and so he wants his brothers to get a real shock, a real 'miracle', because surely that would work. Have a dead man come to life and visit them! That will work—then they will know to notice the least of these! And the saddest line of all is at the end of this passage—for it indicates that it is entirely possible for us to be so blinded by our comforts that even miracles would bounce right off our shiny armor. If we don't have ears to hear what our Scriptures tell us, we shouldn't expect that even resurrection will really penetrate our deafness. We get blinded by comfort into thinking only of this life, and only of our own circles, our own backyards (inside the fences). We forget that we are called to a future and a kingdom that is far beyond what we can imagine for this world, we forget to 'take hold of the eternal life to which we were called', we forget the uncertainty of this world when we have buffers of money to shield us; we forget and fail to see that goodness and mercy and the future rest in the hands of God. So we think we're being shrewd and don't invest in land when the waters rise; we make sure the gates are locked and never see the figure lurking by them in the shadows, needing our crumbs, we wander away and pierce ourselves but don't feel the pain til much later. We fail to see our own faithlessness until the enemies are at the gates, and then we fail to see the love of God that is still present, is still mercy and forgiveness and grace. We fail to see our own hard heartedness until a gulf separates us from those we were called to love and serve. We want so much for our own inclinations to be given the nod of approval by God that we fail to see how our greed separates us from the coming future kingdom that should cast a light upon our present, a light we are called to magnify and spread, a light that shows us blind men and women a world where the poor and outcast are uplifted, a world red with blood that is made whole, a world of greed and hate that is nevertheless loved, loved by God, and thus a world that will be, will be transformed by the prince of peace. We are blind. Let us try to invest in the Lord's vision, not our own. Let us be holy fools for God. Let us buy that worthless land, welcome that leprous begger, have the guts and grace to choose to live a life in which wealth and the getting of it does not take center stage. Give us eyes to see, o God, your coming kingdom, and the will to live now in the not-yet. Amen.