

Seeing Clearly – Naming, Living, Behaving Ephesians 5:11-21

In truth what do you know about Usain Bolt, or Usain St Leo Bolt. He is the fastest Man alive, the fastest human ever; Jamaican, improbably tall (6 ft 5 inches), egocentric, but what else do you know about Usain Bolt? I watched some of the Olympics and I did not know that he was a man of faith, a man of Christian faith. Why would you know that? Well I was not looking closely enough nor have I listened closely enough, for Usain Bolt makes the sign of the cross before his races, and he tweets about himself with tweets like this one: “I want to thank GOD for everything he has done for me cause without him none of this would be possible.”

But would you know he was a Christian from just looking at our news feeds? It has caused something of a minor furore in the UK. The BBC, in all their chatter before races, simply did not mention or could name what Bolt was doing when he does this (sign of the cross). In fact one commentator summed it up as Bolt spending time with himself–time with himself! This is a gross misunderstanding of what is going on. Some see it as political correctness gone mad others simply a result of increased secularisation. But somehow we are no longer to name what is there in front of us; what a situation to find ourselves in.

There is a word that describes that situation, the situation where you can no longer name or see what is there in front of you; we might say we are in the dark. And it is this idea of being in the dark and the real need for light that is at the heart of the reading from the Ephesians which we heard this morning.

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light.

It is rather stern stuff, this material from Ephesians, and certainly I feel that I could easily slip into the kind of stern sermon that moralises in a way that fosters guilt and self-loathing. I don't think that was the intention of the writer of this epistle, and furthermore such sermons are in some way too easy to deliver; such sermons don't navigate the depths of either our experience or the text.

The key idea in the text is that light exposes that which is hidden in darkness (a physics lesson beckons I think). I would suggest that in our lives, that starts with our seeing things clearly, and our being able to name them appropriately. Saying Usain Bolt is 'spending time with himself' as he prays misunderstands his action; it fails to name the action properly. But the writer of the letter to the Ephesians suggests something even deeper. When we fail to see the world clearly, when we fail to name the truth that is before our eyes, it is more than us being in the dark, we are in effect asleep, we will in effect sleep through life. Therefore it says,

'Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.'

Sleeper, awake. We can and do, at times, sleepwalk through life. We allow others to name events and determine our narrative. We slide, glide, slip through our daily lives, passive spectators to our own lives; we sleep even when we should be awake.

But how do we begin this, how do we wake from our dream? There is a suggestion within this text that I think is surprising; it is that we make the most of our time here now; and that brings into play the idea of morality. What we do here with our time is a moral question.

I came across a TED Talk the other day. (TED Talks are online lectures or presentations, which deal with Technology, Entertainment and Design.) They are something of an internet staple these days, often interesting and informative. This was a talk by a Jewish New York Journalist, Arnold Jacobs, who had decided to live his year biblically as literally as possible. I think it went into the Entertainment category of TED TALKS.

Jacobs struggled with competing laws in the Bible and was somewhat chuffed when he finally found an adulterer who he could stone. He got stoned back in return, somewhat to his journalistic delight.

But at the end of his talk he mentioned some of the lessons he had learned. Don't take the bible literally was one, but another was *behaviour influences beliefs*. We often think that belief influences behaviour. However he observed that even without belief (he describes himself as an agnostic Jew), as he behaved in a biblical way (for example giving thanks) that his feelings and beliefs changed.

The biblical push for moral lives might be best seen in this way. We are to lead moral lives because ultimately this is part of a good life, not that we are to lead moral lives or else God will be angry. *Our behaviour helps form our lives to good or ill.*

Religion is not a matter of our heads, or indeed our hearts alone. It is about ourselves, our souls and bodies. Or using words from our readings, we are to walk in the light, to shine the light into the darkness and to be a light to others.

Amen.

Dean John
Bendigo
12th August, 2012