

**Seeing**  
**Mark 10:46-52**  
**October 27, 2024**  
**Rev. Leigh Curl-Dove**

“Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters.”<sup>1</sup>

The great lion, Aslan says this as he creates the world of Narnia. He sings Narnia into being, breathes life into the creatures, and they are given the ability to speak. It’s a beautiful scene. As an eight or nine-year-old child reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* for the first time, I just thought it was cool that the animals could talk. But, now, as I am reading them again in my thirties, I found tears in my eyes as I read this story of Narnia’s creation.

*The Magician’s Nephew* is the sixth book that C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. However in the timeline of Narnia, it is chronologically first. There are different schools of thought on how to read the series. Some folks say to read them in the order of publication, which puts the most popular and well-known book in the series *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* first. Some folks say to read them chronologically in the world of Narnia. And still others have different thoughts and methods. When I read the books as a child, I could not tell you now what order I read them in. Although, I know that I read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* first. Reading them now, I have decided to read them chronologically in the world of Narnia.

I say all this because, (1) I want y’all to know that you are likely in for many references to *The Chronicles of Narnia* in sermons in the coming weeks, and (2) I think it’s important to understand why C.S. Lewis wrote *The Magician’s Nephew* after he had already written five books in the series. Lewis crafted a beautiful world of magic and wonder, a world that held important lessons about how to live and love well and undeniable truths about God’s love for the world. But, it wasn’t enough for readers. They needed to know how Narnia came into being.

I wonder if this fixation of needing to know how it all began kept readers from seeing the beauty and truth already in front of them. It was all right in front of them but still they needed more. It reminds me of “the magician” in *The Magician’s Nephew*, or “Uncle Andrew” as he’s called in the book. Uncle Andrew through some mishaps gets brought into Narnia along with his nephew, Diggory, the next door neighbor, Polly, and a few other characters, as Aslan is singing the world of Narnia into being. Diggory and Polly hear the song of the lion and are enraptured. Fully seeing the beauty and wonder that is taking place right before their eyes. But, Uncle Andrew can’t see it. Lewis writes, “For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: it also depends on what sort of person you are.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 138.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, 148.

When they arrived in Narnia, Uncle Andrew recognized that Aslan was singing but he didn't like it. It made him think and feel things he did not want to think and feel. Instead of confronting those thoughts and feelings like he needed to, he pushed them down and tried his hardest to pretend that what he was hearing was not a song. It was not a song and had never been a song, the lion was only roaring as all lions do. Uncle Andrew worked so hard at this, that he succeeded. He convinced himself there was no song. So when the animals began to talk, all he heard were squawks, growls, barks, and hisses. He couldn't hear the song. He couldn't see what was right in front of him. And because of that, he wasn't able to fully participate in the beauty and wonder around him.

The crowd and, yes, even the disciples with Jesus as he is leaving Jericho also could not see what was right in front of them. Last week, we heard the story of James and John asking Jesus if they could sit at his right and left hand in heaven. You would think they would know better. You would think that at this point they could see it. They had seen Jesus heal the hemorrhaging woman. They had seen Jesus welcome the little children to him, even though they tried to stop them. They had seen him raise Jairus' daughter back to life. They had seen him feed multitudes. And they still ask him for a position of power and higher privilege. But, Jesus is not in the business of elevating those with privilege to a position of even higher privilege.

James and John could not see what had been right in front of them the whole time they had been following Jesus, and the crowd that day could not see it either. It's why they tried to silence Bartimaeus when he called out to Jesus. It's why they moved in front of him trying to keep him out of Jesus' eyeline. They saw Bartimaeus and instead of responding the way they had seen Jesus respond so many times before, they get it wrong again. But, Bartimaeus was determined. It's like he knew this was his one shot. From the spots he had taken up on various roadsides in the city, he had heard rumors of this man called Jesus. He had heard that not too long ago he had restored the sight of another blind man, so maybe Jesus could restore his eyesight too.

Despite the crowd's best efforts (or maybe we should call them worst efforts)—Jesus hears Bartimaeus, Jesus sees Bartimaeus, and Jesus calls Bartimaeus to him. But, Jesus doesn't heal him on the spot. Jesus doesn't presume to know what Bartimaeus wants or needs, even though it might seem obvious. Instead Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Jesus models how to engage in the work of justice and allyship. Instead of doling out some form of paternalistic benevolence and assuming that he knows best and exactly what Bartimaeus most needs, Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The past couple months, I have been working with the Church Council of Greater Seattle and other faith leaders in the city to organize and advocate around the Seattle budget cycle. The proposed budget for 2025 and 2026 will re-legislate the JumpStart Tax. JumpStart is a progressive payroll tax on large corporations (Amazon, Google, Microsoft, etc.) paying high salaries (corporations with payrolls of \$8 million + and salaries of \$182,000+). The tax is 1-2.5% on high salaries paid, and it is the corporation that is taxed not the workers. JumpStart began in

2020 and focused on COVID relief. Now, it funds the offices of housing and community development (affordable housing), small businesses, the Green New Deal, and the Equitable Development Initiative (EDI).

The city is wanting to re-legislate this tax to fill holes in the budget (many of which are there because of increasing funding in other areas, like raises and retention incentives for the Seattle Police Department (including a \$50,000 signing bonus) while making major cuts to the offices of housing and community development). If you want to learn more and take action, you can sign-up to attend a public forum at Queen Anne UMC Tuesday evening, or next week at University Congregational UCC.

Part of the work the Church Council of Greater Seattle is doing is showing up to City Council meetings and special sessions on the budget, because we believe that budgets are a moral document. We want city council to know that the Seattle faith community cares deeply about the budget and the communities that will be most affected by the proposed changes in funding around the JumpStart tax. The Church Council got involved in this work around the city's budget after listening to their own partners like Puget Sound Sage. Puget Sound Sage said, "hey, we need faith leaders to show up in these ways." They are an organization that exists to grow communities where all families thrive through advocating for policy that makes racial and social equity a top goal for decision makers at all levels of government.<sup>3</sup> If JumpStart funding is redirected, Puget Sound Sage and the communities they work with will be directly and negatively impacted.

It would have been easy for Jesus to not ask Bartimaeus what he could do for him. Jesus didn't even have to speak to him or acknowledge him to heal him, but he did. He took the time to hear Bartimaeus, to see Bartimaeus, and to ask Bartimaeus what he could do.

When Jesus asks Bartimaeus the question, I wonder if the crowd fell silent and the disciples, specifically James' and John's ears perked up. After all, Jesus had asked them the exact same question not very long ago. But instead of asking for some grand power or seat of honor, Bartimaeus has a simple request. He just wants to physically see again.

The reality is, is that Bartimaeus could clearly see what the disciples and the crowd couldn't. He could see that Jesus cared about him and the people like him—the people pushed to the side, the people silenced and overlooked, the people who suffered the most under empirical rule. He could see that the way of Jesus was different and good, and so with faith and humility, Bartimaeus asks Jesus to let him see again.

When Jesus looks at Bartimaeus and says, "Go, your faith has made you well," Bartimaeus regains the physical ability to see. But I think the crowd's eyes were opened too. They could see that they had gotten it wrong. They could clearly see who Jesus is and what Jesus is all about, because Bartimaeus had shown them.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://pugetsoundsage.org/about-us/strategies/>

Thanks be to God for the Bartimaeus-es of our world. The ones who can clearly see who Jesus is and what he is doing in the world. The ones who are following the Jesus who hears them, sees them, and calls them even though the world tries to silence them. When we lose sight of Jesus, when we can't or won't see where Jesus is and what he is doing in our world, there is a Bartimaeus following Jesus along the way to open our eyes.