



*Awake, O sleeper, rise from death,
and Christ shall give you light;
so learn his love, its length and breadth,
its fullness, depth, and height.*¹

At last! A 20th century hymn writer that was an Episcopal priest!

Rev. Tucker was educated at the University of Virginia and received his Master of Divinity from Virginia Theological Seminary. During World War I he served as an operating room assistant. In 1920, he was ordained as

an Episcopal priest and served, first, at St. John's Church, Georgetown followed by Christ Church, Savannah, Georgia. Interestingly, this was the parish was John Wesley also served, another prolific hymn writer.²

Our texts this morning include a common theme of seeing and not seeing. I imagine each of us has had the experience of not really getting something another person was telling us and finally it sinks in and we "see" what the other person was trying to tell us. This happens over and over with Jesus.

Two weeks ago it was Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night so that ultimately Nicodemus would "see" in the daylight who and what Jesus truly was. Nicodemus came to trust that Jesus truly was the Son of God, come to earth to help us learn how to live with one another according to God's desires.

Last week it was the Samaritan woman at the well who came to "see" Jesus as the Messiah when Jesus told her about herself. Jesus saw her as more than a woman who had had 5 husbands. Jesus saw her as someone worth talking to.

Today we have the "man born blind" and the efforts to case blame on either the man or his parents rather than accepting that some things just happen in our broken world. The words in the first stanza give us images of what belief in Jesus as the anointed one can mean for us: awake and rise rather than die and molder in the grave. And the love of Jesus has more depth and breadth and fullness than we can truly understand – it surrounds us and enfolds us to keep us within God's loving arms.

John Piper says that Christian living is extremely practical because there is nothing in our lives that God does not touch and touching, change.³ Nicodemus is changed and becomes a witness and provides the oil and herbs for the anointing of Jesus after his death. The woman at the well is changed, and in being changed she becomes an instrument of change for the people of her

¹ Hymnal 1982, 547:F. Bland Tucker "Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death"

² <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-awake-o-sleeper-rise-from-death> (March 25, 2017)

³ <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/awake-o-sleeper> (March 25, 2017)

1 Samuel 16: 1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5: 8-14; John 9: 1-41

village. Spitting on the ground and making mud with the saliva, and then putting that on the man's eyes enables the man to see.

What we see depends in part upon what we are willing to see. This is one reason that eye-witness accounts are often so different. What I prioritize may not be what you do and so we see different things. Both are true while they are different. Paul, writing to the Ephesians, wants them to remember that we are called to be one in Christ. Tucker picks up this hope in verse two:

*There is one Body and one hope,
one Spirit and one call,
one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism,
one Father of us all.*

A reminder that in our baptism we die with Christ and we are raised to new life. That we are baptized once for all and do not need to be re-baptized when you choose to become an Episcopalian from a different tradition. God is god whether we call god by the same or by different names. There is one creator of the world regardless of how we understand that creator to work. In the book Care for Creation,⁴ the authors point out that “eyesight and insight belong together. The more clearly we can see, the more deeply we can know, and the more deeply we know, the more we touch the ground of truth” (11).

When we awake and rise to knowledge of God's love for us, the more we are able in turn to love others. When we are baptized into Christ's one holy, catholic and apostolic church, the more we are called to share our witness with others until we reach an understanding of one Lord, one Faith and one Father of us all. We are not alone. We are connected, one with another, in ways we can only glimpse from time-to-time.

*For us Christ lived,
for us he died
and conquered in the strife.
Awake, arise, go forth in faith,
and Christ shall give you life.*

Our call from Jesus to be disciples means we are to go out into the world. We are to awake, arise and go forth in faith. Coming to church on Sundays prepares us, I hope, to go and serve the Lord. Your faith is not to be lived solely within these walls. In order to grow and deepen, we must build relationships with our neighbors. We are to seek out the lost and the lonely and respond, as we are able, to their needs in ways that are life-giving. To offer that enabling and life-giving help, though, we must be willing to see with the eyes of the heart and not just our normal sight.

As we are reminded in the calling of David, “the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart”. Old, young, male, female – we are each of worth and value to the Lord. Just like David was anointed by Samuel marking his choice by God to lead Israel, and just as we are anointed by chrism on our forehead at baptism, God has

⁴ Ilia deLio, Keith D. Warner and Pamela Wood. Care for Creation (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2008)

1 Samuel 16: 1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5: 8-14; John 9: 1-41

a plan and a purpose for us. See with the eyes of your heart. “Live as children of light- for the fruit of the light are found in all that is good and right and true.” Awake, arise, and live into the call of God on your life. “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.” Amen.