

“I Don’t Know” - Stephanie Sorge, 2/15/26

Langston Hughes asked, “What happens to a dream deferred?”¹ I wonder if his poem of questions ever landed on an answer.

I wonder if the man, born blind, ever dreamed of sight, and if so, what that dream looked like in his mind’s eye. Disability advocates have helped illuminate the ableism in so many healing texts, as if blindness and other disabilities are deficiencies in need of healing. Unlike Bartimaeus, who cried out to Jesus to be healed, this man is acted upon. He doesn’t ask to be healed. Was that a dream of his? Or one so deferred that it shriveled beyond recognition? We don’t know.

Knowing and unknowing play a big role in this narrative. The story begins with the disciples knowing that if this man was born blind, either he or his parents sinned. Everyone knew that! Jesus counters that bad theology. That’s not how any of this works. His response - repeated in other healing stories - is that the reason behind the ailment is to provide an opportunity for God’s work to be seen and known. I have some questions about that, but I’ll move on for today.

The disciples’ certainty is shaken. Harder to shake is the certainty of the Pharisees, who know that this man is a sinner. They embark on an investigation -

¹ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem>

the kind you launch when you don't really care about the truth or its consequences. Imagine that.

They start with the man himself, who can say a few things with certainty: he was blind, he did what Jesus told him to do, and now he can see. Pressed further, he ventures that Jesus must be a prophet. Of course, none of that satisfies the Pharisees. How could they know this man really had been blind since birth? They go to his parents, asking the same questions. His parents are careful to assert only what they know: yes, he is their son, and yes, he was born blind. As for the rest? Ask him. Technically, they've answered truthfully. The gospel writer is pretty sure they were just trying to save their hides.

The Pharisees return to the man, pressing him to take back his story. The formerly blind man starts to see more clearly what's happening now. It's a trap they've set for Jesus, and they're happy to catch him in it, too. He doesn't back down. He uses their own logic against them. No one could have dreamed this was possible, but it happened. He's sure of it - he was blind, and now he can see. Obviously, a sinner couldn't have done the impossible, so Jesus must not be a sinner! The Pharisees respected his logic, congratulated him on the whole seeing thing, and went on their way. Just kidding, they kicked him out.

The man born blind, who began not knowing, came to see and understand who Jesus was, and that led him to believe. His willingness to consider what he didn't know offered the opportunity for transformation. The certainty of the leaders was their own damnation. They held on to their beliefs, even when evidence to the contrary was right in front of them. They should have been the first to recognize God at work, but they missed it. They couldn't fathom that they might be wrong. They missed the gift of transformation, and the promise of impossible dreams realized, because they could not embrace three simple words: "I don't know."

When she accepted the Nobel Prize in Literature 30 years ago, poet Wislawa Szymborska declared "I don't know" to be the beginning of poetry. About that simple statement, she said, "It's small, but it flies on mighty wings. It expands our lives to include the spaces within us as well as those outer expanses in which our tiny Earth hangs suspended." "I don't know" is the space where we can "dream of situations that can't possibly come true."²

I don't know that I've ever connected unknowing to poetry or dreams, but the inverse makes sense. If we hold so tenaciously to that which we think we know, we are sure to miss out on the possibilities that go far beyond what we can

² <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1996/szymborska/lecture/>

imagine. There is even a saying in the Talmud, “Teach your tongue to say, ‘I don’t know.’”³

Poets begin with “I don’t know,” and prophetic voices enliven the dreams. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s most famous speech almost fell flat. It was singer and civil rights activist Mahalia Jackson who urged him forward as his speech was flagging. “Tell them about the dream, Martin!” He set aside his notes and began to preach.

Did the man born blind have a dream? I think so. His dream was to find the one who would have the power to transform everything. That’s the real miracle.

We are facing difficult days. Some are just starting to wake up to those difficulties, as all that they held certain is shaken. To awaken to the realities of injustice and oppression, and then to go on acting as if they don’t matter, is to persist in sin. Once we start to see and know, we can choose to embrace the work of deep transformation, or just bide our time until we can return to dreamless sleep.

Last week I heard Dr. David Evans, professor at EMU and Associate Dean of the Seminary, discuss his recently published book, “Damned Whiteness.” I look forward to reading it. He offered a lament for the time and opportunities wasted

³ Talmud Bavli, Berachot 4a

in the fight for freedom, and challenged us to take up the cause of true abolition. He said, “Rather than being included into the imperialist, white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist spaces destroying the world, I want to join movements that are made for beloved community, where love binds people together and freedom empowers international and ecumenical communities to determine their own destiny. ...[O]ur collective dreaming must be grounded in building new structures where we can practice living in love and freedom.”⁴

Can we be honest with ourselves about what we don’t know? Can we release the comfort of certainty and trade it in for the miracle of transformation? Some days, I feel so discouraged by the state of the world in which we live. Some days, I am certain that the deep change we need is too big, too hard, too far out of reach - impossible. But what do I know?

All week, I’ve had a song from the movie *La La Land* playing on repeat in my head. Emma Stone sings an ode to dreamers: “so bring on the rebels, the ripples from pebbles, the painters, and poets, and plays...”⁵ I’d add bring on the prophets, the good trouble-makers, the activists fanning the blaze... “Here’s to the ones who dream, foolish as they may seem...”

⁴ <https://evanstonroundtable.com/2026/02/09/damned-whiteness-evanston-sermon/>

⁵ <https://genius.com/Emma-stone-audition-the-fools-who-dream-lyrics>

May we all embrace the foolishness of dreams, and the hope for transformation, redemption, healing, and freedom for all. I don't know how we get there, but maybe not knowing is half the battle.