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Have you ever stopped to think about how hard it is to create light? For most of us, it's not too difficult. If it's dark at home and you want to see, what do you do? ...

That answer of course leads to a lightbulb question in relation to the news stories in the media:

How many people does it take to screw in a lightbulb in the basement of the White House? Answer: None, they prefer to work in the dark.<sup>1</sup>

But seriously, think about the process it took to get a light bulb to shine forth light.

Thomas Edison tried two thousand different materials in search of a filament for the light bulb. When none worked satisfactorily, his assistant complained, "All our work is in vain. We have learned nothing."

Edison replied very confidently, "Oh, we have come a long way and we have learned a lot. We now know that there are two thousand elements which we cannot use to make a good light bulb."<sup>2</sup>

I can almost hear Edison saying to his assistant, "Lighten up, will you. We've only tried 2000 ideas. We must be getting closer." Sometimes when we

face a problem, we want easy solutions. We may even begin to freak out until someone reminds us, "Lighten up. All will work out in time. God is still with you."

But we're so tempted to look for the easy fixes, the shortcuts that get us what we want. Sometimes we even want the easy answers to complicated questions when things go wrong, which, I think was the case with the disciples when they encountered a man who could not see. They wanted to know who had caused this man to be born blind, and they suggested the easy answer—that either he had sinned, or his parents had sinned.

It strikes me as a bit odd, though, to think that the man could have sinned before he was even born and that his action had caused his blindness, or that his parents in some way did something wrong before his birth to cause his blindness. Yes, I know, sometimes our wrong actions can have a negative impact on those around us, but sometimes bad things just happen, and we can't find an easy answer.

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It's often easier and tempting to try and blame someone when something doesn't go right, but Jesus didn't let the disciples get away with the easy answer when they encountered a man who had been born blind. I can almost hear him responding, "Lighten up, will you. It wasn't anyone's fault, but it does provide me the opportunity to help him see—and to help *you* see as well—for I am the light of the world."

Jesus then created a muddy mixture of saliva and dirt from the ground to put on the man's eyes, and then he told the man to wash in the pool of Siloam, which brought fresh water into the city of Jerusalem through a series of tunnels and aqueducts. That may sound like an easy solution—wash off your eyes—but imagine walking through town unable to see and with mud in your eyes. I imagine that was not an easy task to do!

Isn't that how it often works in life—that God invites us to walk along the more difficult paths of life, sometimes even along those paths that seem fuzzy or muddy, through a path void of light? I think of the biblical story of Abraham and Sarah

who God invited to leave their homeland and travel across country to a land that God would show them. I think of Moses who God invited to leave his home in the desert to challenge the Pharaoh about the slavery of God's people. I think of Ruth and Naomi who traveled back to Naomi's homeland to try and start a new life, even though both their husbands had died.

Sometimes along these paths we find ourselves unable to see where we are going, as was the case with the man in John's Gospel who could not see. Sometimes the light appears dim, or the light seems to flicker, or sometimes the light just seems to go out, as was the case for Lillian Daniel, a UCC minister in Ellyn, IL, who tells about a trip to Nicaragua where she spent a week in a tree house.

In order to get from the tree house to the dining room, you had to walk down a steep mountain path and then across a long wooden suspension bridge that creaked and swung with the wind revealing the gaping crevasse underneath.

I do not like heights, so I was eager to limit my encounters with this suspension bridge to

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the times when I was most hungry. But one night when I was alone in the tree house, after the sun had set, the lights all went out. I was terrified. But then I sat up and they came back on. The same thing happened again. They went out, and then when I sat up, they came back on. Suddenly it occurred to me. These lights were on a motion detector. But given that this might keep happening all night, I decided it was time to brave the suspension bridge.

Following the lights along the ground, I made my way to the bridge and stepped out on the wooden slats, barely able to see where to place my feet. And then it happened. All the power went out and there was no light anywhere.

Well fortunately, I knew exactly what to do to get those motion detectors' attention. Swinging in the middle of the bridge, reluctantly, I let go of the rope railing just long enough to wave my arms over my head. But nothing happened. I waved them more frantically this time and still, I was in total

darkness. I waited for the lights to come back on and finally realized I was stuck.

I imagine each of us has experienced a similar time in life, when we feel as though we're stuck in the darkness. Take a moment to think of those scary places where you find yourself walking, those shaky bridges that seem to sway in the darkness, places where it's difficult to see what lies ahead...

Now listen to Lillian continue her story about standing on the bridge waiting for the lights to come on:

I could stay here terrified, swinging in the darkness or I could put one foot in front of the other. Given that it was dinnertime, I let my stomach do the walking and slowly shuffled my shaking legs to the other side of the bridge, when, of course, all the lights came back on

I later found out that there were no motion sensors on any of the lights. In the jungle, the power just goes out all the time, and sometimes, it comes back on. Out there on that bridge, waving my hands like a magician, I thought I had the power to turn the lights on.

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When in fact, the source of the power was somewhere else entirely and nothing to do with me.<sup>3</sup>

“Nothing to do with me...” That’s hard phrase to admit, isn’t it, for we often think we can control everything around us. We have the illusion that our power or our wealth or our status or our education or the color of our skin will keep us from the challenges of life. Eventually every one of us will face a difficulty, will make a mistake and sin, will feel as though we’re wandering around in darkness and shadows.

In response we may lash out in anger, accusing others around us for the brokenness of the world, blaming others for our inability to see. It’s in these times that Jesus suggest we “lighten up” and instead focus on the light of God. Jesus invites us to lighten

up and stop blaming others for the random things that often happen. He also invites us to lighten up in blaming *ourselves* when we fail.

Jesus points us toward a source of light that helps us lighten up, a light that comes from beyond the lamps in our homes, beyond the street lights in our community, beyond the light of the moon and sun, beyond the light of the stars. Jesus invites us to see the light of the world, a glow from the beginning of creation, a spark of hope from the Big Bang of the universe—the light of God.

That light from above has placed a spark of hope in each one of us, and although we don’t control the light, we do reflect the light of God. So, lighten up, reflect God’s light, and shine God’s hope into the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgins, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 701-703). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #1.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.toofunnystory.com/2012/03/inspirational-story-light-bulb.html>

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<sup>3</sup> Lillian Daniel, “You Are Not the Power Source,” *Stillspeaking Daily Devotional*, January 6, 2013.