

Journey to the Light
John 9:1-41
March 26, 2017 – Fourth Sunday of Lent

As I've stated previously, the Gospel of John is all about light. It starts at the very beginning where we read: "What came into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:4-5) We've previously heard about the darkness/light paradigm in the story of Nicodemus. Now, today we read that, as Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who was blind from birth; and the disciples ask the question of the day – "Who sinned so that he was born blind, the man or his parents?" In the theology of two thousand years ago, this would have been a typical question; as it was believed that hardships were always God's punishment for sins. But Jesus said, "No." Jesus said, "This man is here today so that you, and believers for the next two thousand years, might know God's mighty works." And he continues with that central Johanne statement: "I am the light of the world." This is actually the second time Jesus makes this statement. Back in chapter eight he stated: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) You know the rest of the story. . . Jesus makes mud from his saliva and dirt, puts it on the man's eyes, tells him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Then the man is able to see. Light has entered his world.

I further note, that in the forty-one verses of the narrative, the spiritual light has also entered the life of this unnamed man. In verse nine, the man simply says "a man called Jesus" did this for me; but, in verse seventeen, he declared that Jesus is "a prophet." In verse 33, he recognizes that Jesus is "from God," and finally, in verse thirty-seven, he accepts Jesus as Lord and worships him. Indeed, over the course of the story, our blind man has made a spiritual journey into the light.

But there are some contrasting characters in our story. First are the blind man's parents. When they are interrogated by the Pharisees, they basically say, "Leave us out of this." They confirm the man's identity and that he was born blind. Beyond that, they respond, "Don't ask us. Ask the man for himself." The Gospel writer states that they responded as such out of fear that the Jewish authorities would throw them out of the synagogue. Now, I need to tell you that scholars have tried to substantiate this fear, and they have found no evidence that anyone has ever been thrown out of the synagogue because of a messianic belief. Still, we can understand, if folks were making what seem like outrageous claims that a major miracle had occurred, they might face a certain amount of consternation.

Then there are the other characters, the Pharisees, the Jewish authorities. They are the ones that are truly in the dark. They're trying to get to the bottom of this whole story. What's this miraculous healing all about? They ask the man; and he tells them this outrageous story about Jesus and mud and the pool. They ask his parents; and they refuse to offer any opinions. So they call the man in again; and he says, "I've already told you what happened. Why do you ask me again? Do you want to be his disciples?" I love that sarcastic response: score one for the blind man!

Of course, the Pharisees strike back, reviling and insulting the man: "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know God spoke to Moses. We don't know anything about this Jesus"; and, after a bit of back and forth, they do expel the man from the synagogue. And Jesus responds, "I have come to execute judgment, so that those who don't see can see, and those who see will become blind."

As I thought about this story, I thought about the three characterizations. First we have the blind man who exercises faith. Think about it. . . This man was blind from birth. Still, he allows a total stranger to make mud from spit, put it on his eyes; and he has the faith to make his way to the pool of Siloam, on instructions of the healer, to wash. Indeed, that was an exercise in faith in and of itself. And what was it like to suddenly see after a lifetime of blindness. That alone must have been a terrifying experience. But the man has faith, and the more he was questioned, and the more he had the opportunity to reflect on his healing, the more his faith grew – grew to the point of his final statement: "Lord, I believe" – grew to the point of worshiping Jesus.

The second group of characters is the parents. They don't disbelieve. Indeed they recognize that this man is their son, that he was born blind, and that he now sees. But beyond that, they simply refuse to get involved. They are concerned for their personal reputation, their personal status in the synagogue, their personal well being.

Then, of course, there are the Pharisees. They simply refuse to believe in the love, in the care, in the healing power of Jesus. They ask and ask again, how is it that this man was healed, simply refusing to believe in the miraculous power of God. And, even worse, they are hard-hearted enough to drive the one who was healed out of their presence, out of the congregation. You see, they had to expel him, because he didn't fit the mold. He dared to claim healing power and maybe even authority for this Jesus, when all Jews knew the power came from the law as handed down from God to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

And so, here we are again, as we need to ask ourselves, to which group we belong. Oh, I don't think any of us are Pharisees – refusing to believe the good news, the power, and the love of the Gospel. And still I need to ask how often is

the church, the Christian church in general and the United Methodist Church in particular, Pharisaic in its views. How often are we ready to cast someone out because they don't fit our mold – a mold based on race or gender or religion or ethnicity or sexual orientation?

Still, it think the characters that deserve a long, hard look are the man's parents. How often do we fall into that category? Oh, I believe in the Gospel. I believe in the power of Jesus Christ. I believe that the blind can now see, through that power; but leave me out of it. Don't ask me to stick my neck out. Don't ask me to get involved.

Friends, I simply do not understand how our leaders on the national, state, and local level, indeed our leaders on both sides of the aisle, and our leaders in the corporate community can call themselves Christian and make the decisions they make. I continue to see decisions being made and policies being forged that, at least to this clergy person, seem to be totally contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Oh I've heard the arguments: The Gospel was written 2000 years ago – it doesn't apply today. To that I say, "Then you don't believe the Gospel?" Another argument I've heard: The Gospel only applies on a personal level. It can't be applied on a corporate or state or national level. To that I say, "Then the Pharisees were correct? Then Caesar we correct? Then Jesus was wrong when he challenged Pilate?" Friends, I don't believe any of that – not for one minute.

But having said all of this, I also need to recognize that old adage. . . As I point one finger out to the world, I have three fingers pointing back at myself. Oh yes, I consider myself a good Christian; and still there are many times that I have refused to get involved. There are many times I've been called to help and said no; and, of course, I have my list of excuses: I'm too busy, I'm too tired, I need some time for myself, I need to spend time with family and friends, I don't have the necessary funds, and the list goes on. And many of those excused may be very valid; and, no, God is not expecting any of us to work miracles. He leaves that up to Jesus.

But still. . . still it's Lent. It's a good time for each of us to examine our lives. To what is God calling us, and how will we respond? Today's story does not tell us what happened to the man after he left Jesus. The story ends with him declaring his faith and worshiping Jesus. I don't think he went on to make sweeping changes in the world. Still, I can't believe he simply went on with "business as usual." His life was changed, and I need to believe the world was a little better place because of it.

And so, today the blind man becomes our model for Lent. As we travel through Lent, we are called, you and I are called to seek to move out of the darkness of our lives, to move ever closer to the light, to bask in the light, to walk in the light, to go forth with the Gospel, the Good News of God's amazing love as

our guide, as we go forth in faith to worship and to serve the risen Christ in all we do. Praise be to God.

Let us pray. . .

Lord, as we bow down to worship you,
let us move out of our darkness,
 into the light of the world.
Amen.

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