

## **Man Born Blind**

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

When Jesus taught in the temple, he was constantly confronted by Jewish teachers who wanted him to explain who he was and escaping the legalistic traps they set for him.

John has a number of personal one-on-one encounters with Jesus and the person going off to tell others their story - with emphasis on the response of the people they told...like the woman at the well. In today's story, the emphasis is on what happens to the storyteller.

Jesus and his disciples are walking along when they encounter a man born blind. Of course, they likely don't know he'd been born blind just by looking at him. The disciples ask a question, and the assumption is that if people suffer, then they must have done something bad to deserve it. In the case of a man born blind, it had to be something done in the womb or something done by the parents. But Jesus answers unexpectedly and gives us the key to understanding the rest of the passage: "...This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." This doesn't mean that God inflicted blindness upon the man so he could later heal him. God takes what has happened and turns it into good.

We all have unique stories of God working in our lives. Right now, we don't know the complete story and we will encounter opposition as we share our story of God in our lives. But we'll also grow spiritually as we tell of God working in us.

Jesus makes mud, spreads it on the man's eyes, and tells him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. Jesus could've completely healed the man with a word, so why bother with this process? Jesus approaches each person in a slightly different way. Some he heals with a word, some with a touch, some with prayer beforehand. Some are healed from a distance, and some very close. Some privately, some publicly. Some seek Jesus out, some are sought out by him. This story is just another instance of a very unique and personal encounter with Jesus.

Just like this person, each of us has a unique and personal story about how Jesus got hold of us...of Jesus working in us...and that makes it important to him. We might think: "But I don't have a dramatic story" - it doesn't matter. Or: "Nothing exciting has happened to me" - it doesn't matter. Jesus thought each of us special enough to die for and to dwell in us through the Holy Spirit.

The only thing the man knows about his healer is that he is called Jesus, and he knows something extraordinary has just happened to him, but he's not aware of the results of that event. Even when we get to the end, we don't know the whole story.

How does his faith work out in his life? Who does he impact?

They brought the man born blind to the Pharisees. And since Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes on the Sabbath, some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?"

The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. They were afraid of the Jews, because the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged Jesus as a prophet or as Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

The law about not healing people on the Sabbath was not God's law, but how the Pharisees had interpreted God's law. God never told them not to perform works of mercy or compassion on the Sabbath.

These were important – educated – prosperous – respected and it went to their heads. They thought they had all the answers. So when Jesus came onto the scene, they took a look at what he was doing and labeled him a lawbreaker - dismissing any possibility that he might be sent from God.

They all looked at the blind man, but they never saw him. He was just the blind guy, born that way. Every day he sat and begged and they looked and walked by. He had never seen their faces until today. He had never seen his own face, his parents' faces, a sunrise, a smile...it was as if he didn't exist. He was a life waiting to be born, a light waiting to shine, a word waiting to be spoken. And this day he became a new creation through Jesus, but they still didn't see him.

The neighbors looked but couldn't see past the image of the way things had always been, a blind man sitting and begging. It's all he had ever known. Blinded by their disbelief, they keep asking him, "How were your eyes opened?"

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out of the temple, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, the one speaking with you is he."

He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him. Then Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind."

**Blindness is not about the quality of our vision or the condition of our eyes. It's not about the darkness around us but, rather, the darkness inside us. How we see others, what we see in the world, the way we see life is less about the objects**

**of our seeing and more about ourselves. We do not see God, people, things, or circumstances as they are but as we are. Until our eyes are opened by Jesus our seeing is really just a projection of ourselves onto the world.**

We all know the saying: There are none so blind as those who will not see. It can be uncomfortable to come out of the darkness into the light. Jesus invites us into the light. Do we accept the invitation, or do as the Pharisees did - decide that we already know all that we need to know?

If we wish to see God and others as they really are then we must look inside ourselves to what is going on within us. In the reading from Samuel we heard from God: "God does not see as people see: people look at appearances, but I look at the heart." **True seeing begins in the heart and not in the eyes.**

The inner darkness of our fears and beliefs is what keeps us from seeing. They cover our eyes like the mud on the eyes of the man born blind. In placing mud on the blind man's eyes, Jesus is holding before him the reality of his blindness. Those who recognize their blindness are sent to wash in the pool and to see with new eyes. The rest of us continue looking but never seeing, our faces caked with mud.

Last week we heard the encounter of Jesus and the 'woman at the well'. Jesus offered her "living water." Now we witness a blind man who not only gains physical sight, but discovers Jesus as the Messiah. She found "living water;" he found "the light of life." Both of them emerged from difficult life circumstances and found a whole new dimension of life.

Jesus is someone who is attentive to and understanding of our particular life circumstances; someone who cares for a rejected woman, a blind beggar and you and me; someone who has a unique design for our lives.

Each of these is a story of healing...an answer to the questions: "How do we meet and respond to Jesus? What do we see? Where is the mud of darkness in our lives?"

Now the time to take stock of how blind we have been to Jesus and his call to discipleship - to renew our vision and fix our eyes on the one who assures of forgiveness for our blindness. Wednesday, March 29th, is our Community Reconciliation Service in the chapel at 7:00 PM. It's here where we can acknowledge our darkness, go and wash and give way to the light of Christ.

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(with excerpts from Rev. Russell B. Smith and Rev Michael K. Marsh)