

Lent 4  
March 26, 2017  
Was Blind and Now I See  
1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41  
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Fellow Ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.  
Gracia y paz de dios el Padre, Hijo y Espíritu Santo.  
Grace and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is a story of confusion, interrogation, anger, excommunication and confession.  
Walking along with the disciples they see a man who had been blind from birth.

***"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"***

The disciples' question is not a surprising one. This is the hey-day of the Greco-Roman Empire. The culture worships a pantheon of Greek and Roman gods. Each god holds a peculiar power over the universe. Mostly, these gods are quarrelsome with each other and relish messing with humans to prove their power. It is no surprise that the disciples assume someone is at fault for this man's plight.

This story is, at times amusing when we take it apart, scene by scene.

Imagine that you are the blind man. Some guy walks up to you, spits in the dirt, stirs it up and plasters it on your eyes. With mud dripping down your face, the man tells you to go to the pool and wash it off. Period.

Why would you follow orders from someone you don't know? Well, it was not uncommon for healers and physicians to use this technique to cure blindness. I wonder if the blind man had tried this before? Whatever has happened before, this time it worked! He went home able to see!

Wouldn't you think the neighbors would be delighted, overjoyed, celebrating? Instead, they gossip among themselves "Isn't this the guy who used to sit and beg?" Some agreed it was the same guy, others said "no, he just looks like the blind guy". Someone finally asks the man "how did this happen?"

The man answers simply, "The man named Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes and told me to go to Siloam and wash. I did, and I can see". The next exchange makes me laugh: the neighbors ask, "where is this man?". The man who was blind says "I don't know". Well of course he doesn't know...Jesus could be standing right next to him and he wouldn't know...he's never SEEN Jesus.

***"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"***

Jesus has stirred up more than mud. He has, again, broken the Sabbath by kneading dirt into a healing poultice. And the Pharisees are ticked off, again! They interrogate the man. The man tells his story again. Like the neighbors, the Pharisees are divided in their understanding. Some say Jesus cannot be from God because he broke the Sabbath, others wonder out loud how a sinner could perform this miracle. So they ask the formerly blind man "what do you say about this man?" His answer? "Jesus is a prophet". But the Jews are not convinced. How could this uneducated guy teach them? They call his parents in for verification. "Is this your son? The one you SAY was born blind? How did he become un-blind?"

Their answer? “Yup, that is our son and yup, he has been blind from birth. But we have no idea how he gained his sight. He’s a grown man, let him speak for himself.

***“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”*** The parents feared excommunication if they confessed Jesus as the Messiah. I can’t help wondering if they believed in their hearts that it was true?

This exchange makes the Pharisees crankier. They call the formerly blind guy in for a second interrogation. Picture the room, a single light bulb hanging low over a metal table, hard wooden chairs, the good cop on one side and the bad cop on the other.

“Give glory to God! We know Jesus is a sinner!” Tell the truth they demand of the man. The man offers no judgment. He tells the truth: I was blind, now I see. What more do you need to know? Why all the fuss? The Pharisees cannot leave this alone. They press him further, hoping his story will change? or they will find some new detail that will discredit Jesus? And the man born blind cuts through all the drama and says, “if this Jesus were not from God he wouldn’t be able to do this miracle”. The man’s answer so enrages the Pharisees they bodily THROW him out of the synagogue.

***“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”*** Blindness, prejudice and anger are not experienced among us as divine punishment or signs of God’s displeasure. Jesus, in John 9, does not try to answer the age-old question of ‘why bad things happen to good people’. Jesus, instead demonstrates that the love of God can and does shine through even the worst of our experiences. Including the cross where he will be hanged in glory.

Notice what happens when the love of God shows up in the midst of despair. All sorts of deviant human behaviors, fears and sidestepping become evident. Neighbors turn on neighbors, Parents abandon children, Leaders deny people their place at the table.

It is not Jesus who judges rather it is our own actions that are revealed and it is our own actions that condemn us.

The heart of this story is the stunning example of growing faith. At first the blind man simply told the story of “a man named Jesus”. The more he talked about Jesus, and what Jesus did for him, the more his eyes were opened. Slowly, he recognized “the prophet”, “the man of God” and finally, face to face with the Healer – seeing Jesus for the first time – the man confesses, simply and profoundly “Lord, I believe”.

***“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”***

Jesus says, “Neither the man nor his parents sinned. He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him”

Jesus, the light of the world, The one sent to do the work of the Father, now sends us to the pool of Siloam so that our blindness to prejudice, injustice and hatred may be healed.

Come and be healed! Come and see!

Thanks be to God!