

“JESUS – THE HEALER”  
Karen F. Bunnell  
Elkton United Methodist Church  
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Fourth Sunday of Lent

John 9:1-41

One Sunday morning, a pastor walked into the sanctuary and saw something rather strange – a group of her parishioners all standing in the middle of the aisle looking up. The first thought that came to her mind was – they’re looking for bats! (You see, one time there had been a bat flying around in there!) What were they actually doing? Well, it was a Sunday School class that had come to the sanctuary to look for symbols – you know, stained glass, carvings, signs of faith. (On-line, “Magdalene’s Musings,” 4/4/11)

Isn’t it interesting that, in her mind, the pastor had already figured out what they were doing, before she had even talked to them. In a way, she saw what she wanted to see.

Isn’t that what happened in this morning’s Gospel lesson as well? It’s a long and somewhat complicated lesson, so let me take you back to the beginning. Jesus and his disciples were on their way, walking along, when they came upon a man blind from birth. Right away, is an example of how people see what they want to see. Right away, the first question the disciples ask Jesus is about sin – and whose sin it was that caused the man to be blind. They saw what they wanted to see. The man was blind, so somebody must have caused it – it had to be the man or his parents. To them, it was cut and dry, it was as simple as that.

Later on, after the man’s sight has been restored, it happens again. At what should have been the happiest time of his life, the Pharisees burst his balloon, because they too only “saw what they wanted to see.” Frankly, it seems they could have cared less about his miraculous healing and the monumental change wrought in his life. No, they were more concerned that Jesus had broken Jewish law by healing him on the Sabbath. And it would be more ammunition for them, another reason to get Jesus in trouble, another way to stir up opposition against Him.

Sadly, it happens a third time, and this time, at the hands of the mans’ parents. When they were questioned about his miraculous healing at the hands of Jesus, they pretty much, as someone said this week, “threw their son under the bus.” They wouldn’t answer the Pharisees’ questions, but instead said, “ask him yourself.” You see, they too, saw what they wanted to see, and what they saw was it

was too risky for them to give Jesus thanks and praise for healing their son – so they passed on the questions the Pharisees put to them.

And incredibly, then it happens a fourth time. This time, it was the Pharisees again. They were so entrenched in the laws of Moses, and following Moses, that they could not conceive that Jesus was who He was – Savior, Healer, Teacher, the Living Water. To the very end of this passage, the Pharisees only saw what they wanted to see – in fact, they were more blind than the blind man ever was.

Jesus, on the other hand, saw so much. He saw beyond the limited scope with which others viewed the world – He saw the whole picture – God’s whole picture. The question of blame in terms of why the man was born blind? Jesus said it wasn’t about the sin of the man or his parents, it was so much bigger than that. God’s love, God’s power, God’s works would be revealed through his healing – that’s why – not because of sin.

And, perhaps more importantly, at least in terms of what we might learn from this passage, Jesus sees the bigger picture of who in this story is really blind. While many of the participants in the story seem to think they have all the answers, in reality, they’re only seeing what they want to see – and Jesus says, they are the ones who are blind.

So concerned were all of them about the letter of the law, or trying to make sense of miracles, trying to explain them, or protecting their own skin, that they missed the miracle! They missed the miracle right in front of their own eyes! They were blind to the amazing, life-saving, life-changing thing that God had done for that man. They missed the miracle!

You know, Helen Keller once said, shortly before her sixtieth birthday, that she felt sorry, not for people who were physically blind (which, of course, she was, and deaf, as well), but for the ones she said were the “real unseeing, for those who have eyes yet do not see.” She continued, “If the blind put their hand in God’s hand, they find their way more surely than those who see but have not faith or purpose.” (On-line, Sermoncentral.com)

She describes most of the participants’ in today’s passage so well, doesn’t she? The passage is literally filled with truly blind people, the least of which is the man who was physically blind. As one person so aptly put it, “they were sighted physically, while being blind to spiritual things . . . they had physical eyesight yet lived in an inner world filled with darkness.” (On-line, “Seeing Again for the Very First Time,” lectionarysermons.com)

And because they did, they missed the miracle that happened right in front of them. But that man born blind didn't, did he? His story is so simple and wonderful. "Jesus was in front of me, he spat on the ground, and made a mud mixture, put it on my eyes, told me to go and wash in the pool of Siloam, and when I did, I could see – I don't know how He did it – all I know is, I was blind, but now I see."

He didn't question it, he didn't need to look any deeper for cause and effect, no, it was that simple for him – "I was blind, but now I see." And later in the story, his healing comes full circle, because not only does he embrace Jesus as the source of his healing, he embraces Jesus as the Lord of his life, and then he is totally, fully and completely healed.

"I was blind, but now I see." If those words sound familiar to you, not just because they're in this morning's lesson, it probably is because you've sung them a million times (and sang them this morning) in the hymn "Amazing Grace." There to, is another story of healing, of one who once was blind, seeing.

You know that story, don't you? John Newton, the author of the hymn, was in the slave trade for years and years. And one day, the Spirit convicted him of how wrong it was. Newton turned away from that life, which was, admittedly, lucrative for him and his family. Yet, he turned away from it, and turned to Jesus, and because he did, he could write about that "Amazing grace that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

Friends, these stories beg us to ask ourselves, "How am I blind? Do I construct my world in such a way that I have to be in control at all times? Do I only see what I want to see, and in the process fail to see God at work? Am I missing seeing God's miracles all around me? How am I blind?"

I read recently of two pastors who, over the years, hadn't really liked each other all that well. One was a conservative evangelical, and the other a progressive liberal. They lived in the same town, and peacefully coexisted with the other clergy in the town. Yet, that's about all they did. For a while, they tried to have a ministerial association in the town, but the two sides were pretty polarized, and finally, they decided it just wasn't worth it to meet together. You see, all of them, on all sides, were only seeing what they wanted to see. The progressive liberal clergy saw the conservative evangelicals as stodgy and closed-minded, unwilling to bend in any way. The conservative evangelicals saw the progressive liberals as wild and crazy, willing to try anything and allow anything, pretty much anti-tradition all the way. And so, this went on for years, and would have gone on – except for the fact, that, at some point, the blinders over the eyes of these two pastors were removed, and they took a step toward each other. It was tentative at first, but they re-formed the ministerial association, and tried to concentrate on the things they had in common – Jesus, most of all – and tried to stay away from the things that

divided them. And what they discovered, was that, after working at this new relationship, they began to love each other, and appreciate each other, and began to do incredible things in ministry to their town and its people. As I read their story, I was amazed at the change that occurred. All of them are still the same people they were – conservative evangelicals and progressive liberals – yet, they are together, instead of apart; or dare I say, they were blind, but now they see.

My friends, amazing things can happen when we admit our blindness and open ourselves up to new ways of seeing the world. Amazing things can happen when we let go of our need to have all the answers, and instead dwell in the mystery of God's love and power. Amazing things can happen when we decide to look at the world with new eyes, and not just settle for seeing as we have always seen, or always having to be right. Perhaps we'll start to see miracles all around us! My friends, amazing things can happen when we ask Jesus to heal us of our blindness!

I'm going to close today by reminding all of us of much that causes us to be blind these days – and that is distraction. The disciples were distracted that day long ago by a need to figure out what sin caused the man's blindness. The Pharisees were distracted by their need to "get" Jesus – to get Him in trouble, to catch Him breaking the law, and to prove that they were right all the time. Even the man's poor parents were distracted trying to save their own necks.

What are our distractions? What keeps us blind these days? Listen to this modern-day parable, and you'll find out:

One day Satan called a convention of his evil followers and said to them, "We can't keep the Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from forming an intimate, abiding relationship with Christ. If they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So let them go to church, let them have their conservative lifestyles, but steal their time, so they can't gain that experience in Jesus Christ. That is what I want you to do (he said). Distract them, keep them from maintaining a vital connection with Him."

One of Satan's followers asked, "But how shall we do this?" Satan replied, "Keep them busy in the non-essentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds. Tempt them to spend, spend, spend and borrow, borrow, borrow. Persuade them to work long hours, to work 6-7 days a week, 10-12 hours a day, so they can afford their lifestyles. Keep them from spending time with their children."

"Overstimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still small voice. Entice them to play the radio or CD player whenever they drive. To keep the TV,

IPads, CDS, smart phones and their computers going constantly. Fill their coffee tables with magazines and newspapers, pound their minds with news 24 hours a day. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, sweepstakes, mail order catalogues, and every kind of newsletter and promotional, offering free products, services and false hopes.”

“Don’t let them go out in nature to reflect on God’s wonders. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts and movies instead. And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotion.” (On-line, Sermonillustrations.com)

Well, you get the picture, don’t you? It’s distractions (among other things) that help keep us blind in this day and age. Too often, those so-called distractions help to form us into the people we are, help to make us people who, like the disciples and the Pharisees in the story, are so sure we see what we see, that we fail to see Jesus and the miracles of God right in front of us.

At the very end of the lesson today, the Pharisees are stunned to ask Jesus, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Slowly, but surely, the veil is being rolled back, and they are beginning to understand what Jesus is saying.

Do we? May the song that we’re about to sing ring true for all of us. May our prayer be, individually and collectively, “open my eyes, that I may see, Lord, glimpses of truth you have for me,” that we may then sing, with John Newton and all the saints, “I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.”

May it be so.

Amen.