

Year A, Lent 4, March 26th, 2017

John 9:1-41

Daytime Sight Made Possible

Part I. The Window of Time

Jesus and his disciples are walking along and they see a man born blind from birth. The disciples ask Jesus who sinned, this man or his parents. They think blindness is a result of sin and those blind are being punished. They think those who are poor, disabled, held back and unfortunate are being punished and it's from God, it's built into the nature of things. Jesus has a limited amount of time to show humanity that God doesn't do that sort of thing. God wants our healing. He wants it for us all. We are the ones who do the punishing.

Jesus tells them no one sinned. This man is blind to show us God's mighty works and so Jesus mixes his spit with the original clay of creation and fixes what is missing. He fills in the blind eye. Now the man can see. Jesus completes creation by filling in the holes. From now on it will be possible to see that God loves us all, no exceptions. It's the work of him who sent me, he says. Jesus wants us to see this before the window of time closes and his light is put out at the crucifixion. We are in the fourth Sunday of Lent. It's getting close.

Part II. The Witch Hunt

Up until now the action has been between Jesus and his disciples and focused on this blind man getting healed. But now the neighbors get involved. They have been talking about the man they knew had been blind from birth. He had become quite controversial. "Some said, the man had been healed, but others said it wasn't him at all but someone who just looked like him."

The healed man kept saying it was him, but who can trust someone who once was a beggar? Besides, because he was born blind he is being punished for sin. Why would God heal the very one being punished? There is something wrong with this picture and they are going to get to the bottom of it.

"So they ask him, 'How are you now able to see?'" He tells them his story. Their investigation continues. "They asked, 'Where is this man?'" He doesn't know.

"Then they led the man who had been born blind to the Pharisees. Now we discover Jesus had made the mud and smeared it on the man's eyes on a Sabbath day. If Jesus is from God why would he break God's rules? This scandalizes them and they too ask how he is able to see.

The Pharisees all agree that healing this man, however Jesus did it, was an evil act. When a person is being punished by God like this man, you don't intervene and take away the punishment. Besides, his being healed on the Sabbath shows that Jesus is an imposter. It never occurs to them to question their beliefs.

Curiously, even their surface unity contains sub-currents of discord. Some said "This man isn't from God, because he breaks the Sabbath Law," while others said "How can a sinner do

miraculous signs like these?" Even in rejecting Jesus they are polarized. They have a problem with division and rivalry. Does this remind you of what is going on in Congress?

Groups divided search for someone to blame and throw out so as to bring unity. They send the tension their rivalry generates into an outsider. It's the classic scapegoating move.

"So they were divided. Some of the Pharisees questioned the man who had been born blind again: 'what do you have to say about him, since he healed your eyes?'" There it is; the mechanism at work. They are hoping this outsider will say something incriminating so they can throw him out and restore their unity.

The man replies, "He is a prophet." That's safe and gives no grounds for rejection. All they can do is reject his statement and move on to his parents, still searching for "the sinner" on whom they can pin responsibility. This happens at a level deeper than their awareness but we see it because this is the very mechanism the cross revealed.

The original question, "who sinned, this man or his parents," still drives the story. The religious leaders are still looking for "the sinner" they think God was attempting to punish with this man's blindness. They want to make sure that God's purposes have not been frustrated by Jesus. They are quite sure they are God's administrators and if Jesus somehow messed up God's plan, they want to set it right again. They never question their assumptions. Will the real sinner please stand up so that we can cast you out!

His parents sense the danger and say "We know he is our son. We know he was born blind. But we don't know how he now sees, and we don't know who healed his eyes. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself." They know who healed him but don't want to say. If someone is going to be blamed and thrown out, let it be him not us. In a sense they sacrifice their own son. This is a witch hunt and they don't want to be its target.

Again the evil eye focuses on the man born blind. The religious leaders place him under oath and tell him what they want to hear. "We know this man is a sinner" they say, corroborate our view and you will be released from suspicion. The man proves uncooperative.

"I don't know whether he's a sinner. Here's what I do know: I was blind and now I see." Since he hadn't answered the way they wanted, their interrogation continues. "What did he do to you? How did he heal your eyes?"

All those years of being blind, of being different, excluded and on the edge had given this brave soul a commitment to integrity. He wasn't about to be coerced into saying what he knew was not true. He even has the courage to express irritation with these witch hunters. "I already told you, and you don't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciple too?"

His smart reply gets under their skin and they retort, "You are his disciple, but we are Moses' disciple. We know that God spoke to Moses, but we don't know where this man is from." How true! The Son of God comes and we experience him as a stranger, an alien and a threat. Soon they will get rid of him.

The man with healed eyes who now sees perfectly replies, “This is incredible! You don’t know where he is from, yet he healed my eyes!” They abandon logic and resort to irrational accusation. ““You were born completely in sin! How is it that you dare to teach us?’ Then they expelled him.” They have expelled the man who sees clearly.

Part III **The Wrap Up**

Jesus has a special love for those who are expelled. When he heard they had expelled the man, Jesus went looking for him. Jesus didn’t want him to feel isolated and subhuman. The world wants its victims to feel they are lesser than others, that’s why they are in prison, in the ghetto, in poverty, in trouble—but not Jesus. Jesus seeks them out.

“Do you believe in the Human One,’ Jesus asks. He answered, ‘Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.’” The man is open and eager to hear more. It’s like that when we bring the gospel to those our culture has thrown out.

“Jesus said, ‘You have seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking to you!’”

“The man said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped Jesus.

Those who are expelled can see clearly when someone shows them how the world works through exclusion. When someone helps them see, they lose their blindness and sense of being subhuman. They begin to see it’s “the dividers” who are blind because they don’t see the fundamental humanity of us all. Jesus’ judgement reveals the truth and those expelled hear good news. The ones who thought they saw all along and considered themselves qualified to divide and expel; they are the ones who are blind.

“Some Pharisees who were with him heard what he said and asked, ‘Surely we aren’t blind, are we?’”