

Open My Eyes

John 9:1-41

As I read this passage from the Gospel according to John, I could hear the words from the Prophet Jeremiah 5:21: would be a good text to "Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear."

Surely, in this passage, the Pharisees had their blind spots and we have our blind spots, as well. To suggest that the man's blindness was due to the sin of either his parents or himself, demonstrates a lapse in understanding the concept of grace. Being blind to the love of God and God's mercy caused the Pharisees to see things from a negative perspective of judgment. The blind man received sight physically; this led him to see spiritually as well. But the Pharisees, who claimed to possess spiritual sight, were spiritually blinded.

The Pharisees thought that their way of thinking was the only possible way. That way of thinking made it all about the actions of the individual. The Pharisees drew the circle too tightly around themselves. These religious leaders, the guardians of tradition, the pillars of the community, stood between God and the people. We might ask, "Are they not more handicapped by blindness than the man who was healed?" This is a story of two kinds of blindness. One is physical--it's a tragedy--but one that can be dealt with through courage, determination, and education. It calls for our support through research, compassion, and consideration. The other is spiritual, for which there is no excuse. Spiritual blindness can be overcome through the extravagant Grace of God in our Lord Jesus; and if we are honest, for most of us this is the one that is hardest for us to deal with. The fact is, Jesus can cure the blind. Getting us to see past our own self-interest – to see the glory of God in the lowest and the least – now THAT is a real miracle.

However, we cannot be light to the world until we can see that light in the eyes of beggars in our town and in our global village, welcoming that light as Christ's presence among us and receiving each bearer as a neighbor, a brother or sister with a face and a name.

You see, there is danger when we draw our circles too tight. The reaction of the religious authorities to the man with his sight restored reminds us that, for too many of us, newness is a threat. Newness is a reminder that things are never completely in our control. It reminds us that we don't know near as much as we thought. It reminds us that we can be blind of heart to what God can do and is doing in our world and in our lives. Drawing the circle too tight can rob us of the joy of knowing and experiencing the power of the Living God in our lives.

Longfellow, writing into his late 70s, early 80s was asked how he continued to be so creative. He pointed to an apple tree older than he that was still producing fruit. He challenged, "See the little green on the wood, from that comes the flower, then the apple. The apple grows on the new wood, and I make sure that I have some new wood every year."

In the third chapter of John, Nicodemus couldn't see drawing the circle larger and starting over. In the fourth chapter of John the woman at the well only found Jesus when she stepped outside of the circle that had been drawn by those who judged her. Let's be honest. At times we, too, draw a circle around another, just as Nicodemus did around Jesus, or the neighbors did to the Samaritan woman, or in today's lesson the religious authorities in the blindness of heart did to the blind man and his parents. Who gave them or anyone the assignment to draw the circle anyway?

We, too, have a hard time when God gets beyond our neat little world, when we are pushed to think in new ways, to go a different path we don't want to see. In the novel *Revelation*, Peggy Payne tells of a Presbyterian minister who experienced a theophany. One afternoon, while grilling steaks in the backyard, he heard the voice of God speaking to him. It was a revelation. It was the kind of revelation that would change his life; he would never be the same again. The rest of that story tells the price he paid for telling of the revelation. Do the leaders of his congregation rejoice with him? Not exactly! They do provide free psychiatric care and paid administrative leave.

In the church there are caucuses and groups that judge others and divide the Body of Christ. They see issues in terms of black and white. Like the authorities in our Gospel lesson, they are always right and the others always wrong. Within the Body of Christ we need to be one in the Spirit. In the church there needs to be room for diversity of understanding but unity in love. Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "I have sheep not of this flock." There will be diversity, and we must be careful to let God to set the boundaries.

We are challenged to see the very hand of God at work in our lives. Listen again to the great statement of faith by the man once blind, "One thing I know, I was blind but now I see." The authorities were afraid of what would happen when God got involved and they were no longer in control, and for that reason there was a price to pay. The man with new sight's profession of faith came with a great cost. He was cast out of the synagogue, cut off from his family. That was the ironclad certainty of the law.

Once we have seen with our heart we can't go back to the same world. When we have experienced the mighty power of God we see people differently, we see issues differently. We cannot expect everybody to see as we see. We see Jesus at work in every aspect of the world around us. When our eyes have been opened, we see what God is doing and we fully know the grace, mercy, love of God and truly experience the joy of Jesus. Amen.