

"I Don't Want to Get Involved."

TEXT: John 9: 1-41

"I don't want to get involved."

This should be a motto
for the American way of life.

Several years ago, a TV news report on campaign finance reform illustrated the depth of apathy among American citizens. The reporter asked us to imagine a theater of 100 American citizens. One-third are not registered to vote. Another one third who are registered don't vote. Only the remaining one-third actually cast a ballot. Only one person in 100 contributed \$1,000—the maximum allowed under the law then—to individual political candidates.

Almost two-thirds of our citizens don't vote. They are willing to let someone else make decisions about their lives because they don't want to be bothered. They are willing to let someone else make the campaign contributions that grease the skids of American politics. I suppose that people have the right to apathetic. Indeed, if freedom and democracy means anything, non-participation is viable option. And yet, the existence of extensive apathy in our society is a sign of our weakness. If people decide, in their freedom, to not be involved, they sap the very system that provides freedom and democracy.

Furthermore, you cannot really avoid participation. If you don't vote or support the political system, other people will elect government officials who will make decisions about your life. Other people will spend money to influence decisions made in Washington, D.C. or Jefferson City. If you decide to opt out of the system, you have in effect supported the system and have given it permission to make decisions about your life and our nation.

People are apathetic for many reasons. Fear is a major factor. We are fearful of the consequences of getting involved. If you see a crime being committed on the street, your first thought is for your own safety. *"Maybe the criminals will attack me next!"* If you report a crime to the authorities it becomes a major hassle: police reports, newspaper reporters, maybe even a court appearance. It is safer and easier not to get involved.

Fear also hinders involvement on another level. When people are given an opportunity to become involved in civic affairs, many decline because they dislike the bitterness and conflict which often emerges out of political disputes. Most people don't like conflict, so they avoid it. This is also true in the church. It is often difficult to enlist people to become church officers. Some people are reluctant to make the commitment of time and energy necessary to do the work but on a deeper level, they also fear the consequences of controversy. We all know the stories of bitter church fights which have torn churches and even families apart. We don't want to be involved.

Fear of involvement is a weakness, even a handicap, instead of engaging ourselves in the institutions vital of society, we prefer non-involvement.

Instead of provoking the debate necessary to spark creative solutions to our challenges, we prefer the non-controversial middle ground. Our inability to deal with controversy creatively and constructively is a handicap which saps both church and society.

A man with a handicap is at the center of our gospel lesson for this morning. In this chapter of John, Jesus restores sight to a man blind from birth. Oddly enough, this divine healing of his handicap embroils this man and his family in a series of controversies with the Pharisees. This passage underscores the link between healing and involvement in the world around us.

The man is healed of his blindness and immediately is embroiled in controversy. After the healing of his affliction, we would have expected him to have an easy life. Instead, his life got harder. The Pharisees entangled him and his family in a series of disputes. He was eventually thrown out of the Jewish community and alienated from his friends. This man's sight was restored for a greater cause: By the end of the story he believes that Jesus is Lord, but he had paid a very high price.

Maybe that is the main point of the story: Sometimes we can pay a very high price when we are healed by Jesus. Once Jesus has touched us, we are compelled into a life of involvement and controversy.

This is not a decision we would make. Most of us prefer to avoid controversy. The point of today's lesson seems to be that involvement in human conflict is a decision God makes for us. In this story, there is no indication that the blind man sought out help from Jesus. Often in the gospel stories, sick and injured people cry out to Jesus for help. In this case, however, the blind man was minding his own business when Jesus comes along and restores his sight. At first, the blind man seems to be merely an object in a theological dispute between Jesus and his disciples.

The disciples had asked,

***"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents,
that he was born blind?" (John 9: 2.)***

This question reflects an assumption that blindness is the result of sin. The disciples want to know: Who sinned? The man or his parents?

Jesus rejects their assumption the man was blind because of sin. Rather, he is blind so that works of God might be revealed through him. When Jesus restores his sight, the blind man is transformed from an object of pity and theological gossip into a human being who becomes embroiled in the dynamic controversies of life. This is not the life the man would have chosen for himself. Jesus chose it for him. Jesus healed this man and then thrust him into the controversies of life.

So it is with us. Sometimes healing is too difficult. Sometimes we prefer to stay the way we are, because we are fearful of change. Any objective analysis of the human condition reveals we are sinful people in need of healing. We are dying a slow death because of the pain and suffering we inflict on each other and on the planet itself. Jesus Christ offers forgiveness for our sins, but we resist his healing power in our lives because we are afraid of the consequences. We are afraid, but God heals us anyway even when we do not ask for it or expect it. Furthermore, when God heals us, we are also compelled into a life of involvement and even controversy.

All too often, we try to avoid God's love and forgiveness of our sins. If this is our attitude in life, we will continue to wallow in the sins of life, unable to master the possibilities of a more humane human life. Faith in Jesus' promise of forgiveness of sin helps us overcome our fears of involvement. Living a life by such faith is not easy. This is why we work so strenuously to avoid confrontation. We prefer to trust our own ability to avoid conflict instead of trusting God to lead us. And yet, in the final analysis, we can depend only on God. Even when we resist the power of God's healing, God will come to us anyway, just as Jesus came to the blind man. God will forgive us and then compel us to be involved. It won't always be easy, but it will be faithful to Jesus who heals you and forgives you of your sin. Accept his healing and be involved.

Let us pray.

"Now to the One who by the power at work
within us is able to do far more abundantly
than all we ask or think, to God be glory
in the church and in Christ Jesus,
to all generations for ever and ever." AMEN.