

## John 9:1-41

Last Wednesday at our Bible study we talked about Cleopas and his companion on the way to Emmaus when Jesus joined them on the road. They didn't recognize him until at the meal Jesus blessed and broke the bread. The theme of the week was how sometimes we never expect to see something or someone, so we don't see what is right in front of our faces; therefore we need to have a broader view, a more open mind. The exercise linked to the study, which we did not do, was to blindfold someone and have them try to reach a specific destination only by hearing directions from the others in the group. One of the persons said that they have tried closing their eyes and walking around. They tripped over a few things... I cannot imagine being blind.

The Bible tells us of several instances when Jesus cures blind men who come to him. The man in today's gospel was born blind, and as Jewish tradition would suggest the disciples wanted to know who sinned, his parents or him? It would be a little difficult, I would think, for the man to have sinned because he was born blind; although, because of Adam, we are all born with sin. His parents could have sinned, but Jesus said no one sinned. This really would have confused the disciples. Even today, there are persons who believe that anything that goes wrong goes wrong because of sin. There is a paper written by Jonathan Edwards called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" which purports that all bad things are caused by sin. When we read this in seminary my friend Molly decided that it was absolutely true. Years later when I told her I broke my back, the first thing she asked was, "Who sinned?" That didn't make me feel very good.

It never fails when I read these healing miracles, and hear about persons who are healed in today's world after prayer and laying on of hands, it never fails to make me wonder why some people are healed and others are not. Is it that God loves some persons more than others? I don't think so. Some pastors or people would say that the person who isn't healed doesn't have enough faith, and if they had stronger faith, then they would have been healed. Well, that's just a bunch of baloney. We don't know why God chooses to heal some persons and not others. One theory I have heard is that the person who passes is being saved from something far worse that would have happened to them in their future. I don't know if that is true or not. We just have to accept that God is in control, and has the best interest for each and every one of us who love Jesus.

What this gospel reading is all about is not a healing miracle, but the truth is that some people believe in Jesus and accept him as God's son, and others do not. In the time of Jesus, the religious leaders, the ones who should have readily accepted him because of the Old Testament prophecies that were revealed through his birth and life, those persons chose to be scared of losing their power and rejected Jesus for who he is. The entire gospel of John is a story of not seeing. People are oblivious to who is right there before them.

The physical restoration of this man's sight is only the surface of what is happening in this story. Jesus uses mud on the man's eyes, reminding us of the Genesis creation story. Then he sends the man to Siloam, a pool, in order to wash his eyes, reminding us of baptism. Jesus is recruiting the man from the margins as a disciple, one to follow him. His disciples can't see it, they can't understand how someone from the margins, someone who possibly sinned, could become a follower. And the religious leaders are questioning the healing act on the Sabbath. No

one understands how blind they actually are to those on the margins, and how their own sin excludes those persons.

Jesus is the light of the world and allows us to see the world more clearly. Do we have eyes to see? Will we get bogged down in divisive controversies or will we see opportunities to be a part of God's works? How can we be a part of God's love in the world?

Jesus calls an outsider to be a part of the majesty and he sees. The disciples miss it because they are absorbed with the sin. The religious leaders miss it because they are worried about breaking the Sabbath rule. Yet, when we stand back and point at the disciples and the authorities are we the judgmental one? This story gives us insight to being self-righteous and judgmental. We are told in Matthew 7:1-3 "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For the judgment you give will be the judgment you get, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? "

Does this mean that we aren't to observe the character of another person before we make a choice to befriend them? No; what it means is that we are not to think less of any person than what we think of ourselves. Each person is created by God, in God's image. Perhaps we have been chosen to serve on a jury for a first degree murder. The facts prove the person is guilty of the crime. As a member of the jury are we supposed to let the person go free because we don't want to make a judgement against them? No, they were proven guilty of a crime and deserve to be punished. Perhaps not by the death penalty, but the appropriate sentencing determined by the court. Does it make them any less human? No, although sometimes the crime they committed is so heinous we would like to think so. Perhaps this is the one sheep the shepherd is seeking.

But let's not get as serious as a person on a jury. Let's consider the person whom you know has broken a commandment, such as committing adultery. Do you look down upon that person, treating them less than, and considering yourself superior because you have never done that? Jesus said, "Let he who is without sin throw the first stone." Does that mean that sin is ok? Of course not. Although our bad choices may have bad outcomes, life happens. I did not break my back because someone was sinning. I broke my back because I wasn't being careful unloading cases of food from the dolly at the food bank distribution site. The man in today's gospel reading wasn't born blind because someone sinned, it just happened. Bad things do happen to good people. God is the ultimate judge, not us. And for that I am grateful.

All glory be to God.