

John 9:1-41
March 22, 2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we encounter a man blind from birth sitting outside the boundaries of the city walls begging for mercy from strangers. And Jesus spots him too. The disciples become focused on why this man was born blind while Jesus focuses his attention on revealing God's works in healing this man so that he can see physically. We learn that after the man washed in the pool he came back able to see. He was healed and his eyesight had been restored. A miracle had happened. This all takes place in the first seven verses of our gospel.

And with the remaining thirty-four verses we have a lot of discussion between the religious leaders, the man's neighbors and others who had seen him before he was healed, his parents, and the man himself. Instead of celebrating in the joyous act that had taken place before their very eyes, giving thanks to God for a miracle that had never been seen before, and about realizing who Jesus is; those gathered simply can't stop asking questions.

- Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?
- How were your eyes opened?
- How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?
- What do you say about him?
- How then does he now see?
- What did he do to you?
- How did he open your eyes?

Like the disciples, they are all so intent on trying to comprehend the “who, what, when, why, and how” of the story - they can’t realize their own blindness to the remarkable healing and revelation of God’s work in Jesus right before their own eyes that are physically able to see. They become absorbed in trying to figure out who sinned that this man was blind and trying to cast blame on him or his parents. They also become absorbed in their attempts to accuse Jesus of sin for healing on the Sabbath. After all, the Sabbath is the Lord’s Day. It is a day to stop and give thanks for the Lord’s work and in this healing they simply could not see the Lord’s work before them. They continue to remain in the dark to who Jesus is. They continue to fail to believe even though they see with their own eyes. It is they who remain in sin; for sin, according to the Johannine Gospel, is failing to believe in God’s Son. Even as the man responds, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see,” their hearts are still hardened and unable to see and worship what God has done.

This story is about a transformation from being unable to see to being able to see (physically). But it is also about a spiritual transformation. This man is changed by Jesus and comes to see who He is. He comes to belief in Him and his life is forever changed on the outside and on the inside. He is transformed from merely a beggar, an unknown crying outside the walls of the city, to a disciple of Jesus knowing that it is Jesus alone who can bring wholeness and healing. At the beginning of our story the now healed blind man answers it was the man named Jesus who had healed him. Later on, he speaks of Jesus as a prophet. Further along, he refers to Jesus as from God and finally the transformation is complete, and the man is truly able to see (believe) calling Jesus Lord and worshipping him.

This past week has been – well – like something out of a movie turned reality in the blink of an eye. We are all adjusting to a new way of life. We are asking our own questions such as, “What happens if I get inside the 6-foot bubble with someone in the grocery store?” “How long is this going to last?” “Can I visit my loved ones, such as parents or grandparents, who may fall into the ‘most at risk’ category?” “Will I have a job tomorrow, next week or next month?” “Will the markets ever recover and the investments many of us may have rebound?”

Valid questions. I think I have asked most of those questions over the past week. Yesterday, we ventured out to Target. It was only my third time out of the house and into a “public” space this past week. In many ways, I feel guilty about that. Have I become so fearful that I have completely closed myself off to the world and to my neighbor? I did my best to maintain the six-foot rule; at times, even though I needed something further down the aisle but seeing someone there heading my way, I retreated to find an aisle that was vacant of any other shoppers, quickly sped down it and circled back to the opposite end of the aisle I was just in and snatched up the item I was searching for. Except there was one time, as I exited an aisle, turned into the main aisle when suddenly I was just a couple feet from another shopper heading for the aisle, I was just in. We both looked at one another, startled, and I could see the look on her face was probably the same as the one on mine. We each silently darted the other way to reestablish our circle of safe haven. I felt relieved; but, also a bit sick to my stomach that I had not seen this lady as just another neighbor in need of a few supplies having similar concerns, fears, and anxieties I was having. Instead, I had seen her as someone who could unknowingly have this virus that I needed to stay far away from. In many ways, I think my eyes become blinded by this virus lurking among us.

Yet, there is another blindness I am fearful has begun to set in over this past week and that is finding joy amidst these bleak days. It seems that should have been the natural response by those gathered to this miraculous healing Jesus performs. Yet, the only one rejoicing, giving thanks, and proclaiming God's presence is the man now able to see. The others are too engrossed in trying to figure things out.

We are all adjusting to this new way of life. We are grieving things we could once do freely that we no longer can or activities or events in the near future we had been looking forward to that may no longer happen such as a wedding, trip, party, or even if there will be a softball or baseball season, prom, spring play or even a graduation ceremony. So many emotions. So many changes. So many unknowns.

Quickly, the noon-day sun we stand in can become darkened by the storm cloud that has settled in above us. Optimism can be replaced by pessimism. Hope overtaken by doubt and despair. Joy replaced by sorrow.

Yet, we will not let that happen. We are the body of Christ even when we can't physically gather. We are a community of hope! We are people of the light! We rejoice in the goodness of God, the unfailing love of Christ, and the ever-present touch of the Holy Spirit even when the world in which we find ourselves leads us to respond differently.

So, this morning let's choose joy. Joy in Jesus' healing of the blind man along the side of the road. Joy in the saving grace we have been freely granted through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior. Joy in the unconditional love we have from God. Joy in the baptismal waters we have been washed in that open our eyes to the new life we have in Christ. Joy for the gift of technology so that we can be together this morning. Joy for our laptops and cell phones. Joy for the internet.

Joy and thanksgiving for the many doctors, nurses, first responders, scientists and researchers bringing the healing touch of Jesus to those afflicted by this virus and seeking diligently to find ways to slow it and find a vaccine for it. Joy for the emails and phone calls we have received. Joy in board games that have been buried in the closet, replaced by electronic games on phones and tv's, but now brought out, dusted off, and bringing smiles, laughter, and a sense of togetherness often lost in our busy lives.

Joy! In this time, the world needs us to spread it. Live it. Pray for it. Abide in it. Hope for it. Proclaim it. Jesus is the source of that joy and it is his healing touch that frees us to be joy for the world.