

March 22, 2020
Fourth Sunday in Lent
John 9:1-41
Pastor Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath

For the last two weeks we've been hearing stories of light and dark- seeing and not seeing. First it was Nicodemus who came to Jesus under the cloak of night and then it was the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, who came to see Jesus in the bright light of day. Their stories demonstrate that in the gospel of John what you see and how you see it is about more than just our physical sight. It's connected to faith.

If you see – you believe. And today, we have one more story about seeing and believing. It's from the ninth chapter of John's take on the gospel.

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Jesus was in Jerusalem and as he was walking around, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. I'm guessing that the man was begging at the intersection of two streets or maybe near one of the gates into the city. As they went by, the disciples asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

That was the going theory at the time. If you were born differently abled in one way or another – it was assumed that you or your parents had sinned. Which may seem antiquated or foolish, but it happens again and again throughout human history. Strangely, one of the people to raise the issue this last week was Kourtney Kardashian, who suggested that perhaps the Coronavirus was God trying to get our attention. I don't think that's the way God has ever worked, based in large part on this story.

Jesus squashed the idea very quickly, saying that neither the man nor his parents had sinned. Instead he told the disciples that the man was born blind "so that God's works might be revealed in him." Jesus said, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Now, don't get me wrong. I like a good explanation as much as anyone. But I'm not so sure that the man's blindness was some kind of elaborate set up so that God could do something amazing at just the right time and in just the right place. The God that I know isn't that manipulative or mean spirited. So maybe the truth is this. That man was no better or worse than anyone else. God knew him inside and out and loved him just as he was. The guy had limitations, just like the rest of us, but despite our frailties and imperfections, we are called to be in relationship with God and because of that connection to God- things happen. Good things and those happenings show the world that God is at work in our lives.

So in a way that was quite unexpected and rather miraculous, Jesus gave the man his sight. He spat on the ground, made some mud with the spit and spread it on the man's eyes. Then he told the fellow to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam outside the city and when the man came back, he could see.

Unfortunately, as soon as the guy could see- people started questioning the truth that was right in front of them. The truth wasn't to be trusted. It must be a trick. What happens next is like something out of an Abbot and Costello routine.

Are you the man born blind?

Yes.

No, you can't be.
But really, how can you see now?

*Yes, it's me.
This man told me to put mud
on my eyes and wash and
now I see.*

The people who knew the man suddenly didn't recognize him even though they had seen him day after day – for years. So, they decided to question his parents.

Was your son born blind?
Is that your son?
Then he wasn't born blind.
Are you sure that's your son?

*Yes, he was
Yes, that's him.
No, he was born blind.
Well, we know this is our son.
And we know he was born blind.
But we don't have a clue how
this happened.*

And because they were afraid of getting in trouble with the local law who did NOT like Jesus they said...

*We don't know how it happened or
who made it happen.
Quit bothering us and talk to him!
He's an adult! He can answer
for himself!*

There's more running around that takes place and more questioning and it's crazy! Everyone can see that something has happened. The man can see! But they couldn't see that God had been at work. Eventually, the man is worn out from all the fuss and he tells the crowd

You people are incredible! Honestly! You don't know where Jesus comes from- you don't know if he is from God or the devil and yet - he opened my eyes. I can see. We all know that God doesn't listen to those who hate him, but God does listen to those who worship him and listen to him. Since the world began, nobody has been able to give sight to a person born blind. But Jesus did it! And if he weren't from God, it never would have happened. If he weren't from God, he couldn't do anything like this!

It was a powerful speech. He nailed it. He pointed out the flaws in their argument and he testified to the holiness of Jesus. And so, they did people do when they're frightened of the truth. They tried to silence it. And they ran the man out of town.

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When Jesus heard how the man had been treated, he went looking for him. And when he found him, he asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

The man replied, "I want to believe, sir. Show me – tell me who he is."

Jesus said, "You have seen him with your own two eyes. I'm the one." I'm the guy. And the man knelt down in front of Jesus and said "Lord, I believe."

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This story is chock full of people whose eyes work just fine, but they couldn't believe what they were seeing. The Messiah was standing right in front of them, but they couldn't see him. The Light of the World was shining bright, but their lack of faith left them in the dark.

At the end of the story, the only person who can clearly see Jesus and believe what he sees – is the man who was given his sight. But being able to see isn't the most important thing that happened to him that day. As he knelt in front of Jesus and confessed his faith, the man's life changed. He saw Jesus for who he was and began a whole new journey of faith. And life was never going to be the same again.

That's how it is when you're in a relationship with Jesus. Things change. Which sounds good, except that change is disruptive. Change means letting go of the life we know, to live into the unknown.

The man could see, but now what was he going to do? His whole life was going to be different. Family, friends, work, home. His day with Jesus was going to impact every facet of his life.

That's how it is with Jesus. When you get involved with him, he changes things. And sometimes those changes can be hard. New decisions. New choices. New places and new people. Change can make us anxious because we don't know how it'll all work out. But when Jesus invites us to change, it's life giving, because what Jesus wants for us is a life that is full and rich and abundant. By which I don't mean rich with money and abundant with stuff. Instead it's a life filled with meaning and rich with the blessings of the Spirit. It is a life that is abundant with the love of God.

Sometimes we resist the transformation that comes from following Jesus. It's almost always a disruption. And it can be hard work to walk in the Light, but our lives are designed for this. We were made to reveal the love of God. We have seen and we believe, and so we are called to let our lives show Christ's love to the world. Some days, we're going to get it right. And some days, not as much. But keep at it! Christ has, is and will shine bright through you.

Keep looking for the ways that God shows up in your life. Keep your eyes open to where the Lord will need you next.

Be salty. Let your light shine before others that they can see Jesus. Don't be afraid to be the city on the hill. The light on the Ridge. Even if you have to do it from the confines of your living room, there are always ways to shine with the light of God so that others may come to see Jesus.