

Fourth Sunday of Lent/March 30, 2014

John 9:1-41

Rev. Joel M. Krueger

"I Can See Clearly Now"

For a long time, I've had this idea, this dream, to one day write a musical production, or at least come up with the basic premise and parts and then have someone much more accomplished in that area put it all together, finish it up. It will be a *Rock 'n' Roll Gospel*, kind of in the style of an Andrew Lloyd Webber production, like *Jesus Christ Superstar*, or *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. But mine will include real songs from the rock era to portray the life of Jesus. It may follow a particular gospel account or if it may be a blending of all of them. But it would fit pop songs with different parts of the gospel account. Like at Jesus' ascension, Jesus might sing *"Your love keeps lifting me higher, than I've ever been lifted before"*, or Mary Magdalene might sing Aretha Franklin's *"You make me feel, you make me feel like a natural woman"*, and I envision the disciples behind her, as backup singers, echoing her words.

Well, this story of the blind man in John has a song as well. To this scene I would attach the song released by Johnny Nash in 1972, *"I Can See Clearly Now."* (sing the first verse) *"I can see clearly now the rain is gone. I can see all obstacles in my way. Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind. It's gonna be a bright, bright, sunshiny day."*

The words fit pretty well with the scene portrayed here by John in his gospel. We have a man suddenly given sight, rejoicing in the idea that now he can see! The song speaks of the sense that the *"rain"* and the *"dark clouds"* are now gone, that things that were once obstacles are now visible and thus avoidable, and there is the overwhelming feeling that *"It's gonna be a bright, bright, sunshiny day!"* Doesn't that just fit this story?!

Except, the only problem is, that in this story from John's gospel, no one seems to want to celebrate with the blind man in his newly given sight. Nobody else seems to see it as a *"bright, bright, sunshiny day!"* They all, for various reasons, seem to be in a *dark, dark unhappy place*. Precisely what John wants us to see!

The story begins with Jesus and his disciples walking along, coming upon this blind man, most likely sitting alongside the road, his cup or hands held out, begging for food or money or whatever others may give him. They ask, *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* reflecting the common understanding of the time that illness is a result of one's sinfulness. Jesus dismisses the concept altogether, and says that his blindness is an opportunity for God's work to be revealed.

And so he makes the mud and places it over the man's eyes and sends him to wash in the pool down the hill. The name of the pool is "Siloam" which we are told means "sent." Now, because John writes with symbolism in every paragraph, I can't help but think that he is somehow making an allusion to the image of a new convert being "sent" after receiving the call to faith, and Jesus' command to *"go and wash"* to the image of baptism.

Anyway, the man does this and returns, now able to see! Amazing! Right? Well, the neighbors and those who have always known him as the "blind man" don't even recognize him. Now we might be able to excuse this to some degree and have some sympathy for them, as he has indeed experienced a dramatic change which makes him different and therefore probably appears different. Maybe not too much unlike when we see someone in a different setting or in different clothing than we are accustomed to seeing them and so don't recognize them.

But c'mon, this is someone who has lived with them all his life, has sat at this particular place probably for years, is someone they may have helped from time to time, assisted him in getting across the road, or brought him water. Part of what is going on here is the question of how well, how deeply did they ever really see him? Did they ever truly see him for who he was, or was he always just the "blind man" known only for his outward disability?

Then we have the Pharisees who's focus seems to be on the issues of Jesus breaking the Sabbath laws by healing on this day. They completely miss the bigger picture of the amazing thing that has happened here because they are too preoccupied with the nitty-gritty of the law and the rules and they are blinded by their need to paint Jesus as the "sinner" and not the hero, allowing them to maintain their control of the situation and ultimately of the religious traditions and practices of the people.

Most astonishing of all however, are his parents. Even they, the ones who raised him and cared for him all these years, when faced with the possible condemnation of the religious establishment, retreat in fear from going to his defense. Their response when asked about him is, "*He is of age; ask him.*" Like the others, they are unable to see the miracle that has just occurred before their eyes.

Yes, a miracle had occurred but John doesn't call these things miracles. For John, they are "signs." That is, they ultimately point to something beyond themselves, to a truth that we are supposed to look at. Here John seems to be saying that the institutions that are supposed to help us see clearly, that are supposed to give us vision, are not infallible. That the community, our governing authorities and religious entities, even our families, can be stuck in the darkness, stuck in ways of thinking that are dualistic, pitting one thing against another, leading us into self-centered ways of being where we ultimately care only about ourselves and are unable to empathize, to understand, to sacrifice or give of ourselves for others and thereby unable also to share in their joy as well.

Here in John, like the story of Jesus turning water into new wine at the wedding in Cana, and like the story of Nicodemus meeting him in the dark of night to learn about being born anew, and like the woman of Samaria at the well who learned about the new, living, flowing water that Jesus was able to offer, here again we are given a sign, that, for those who have eyes to see, may see.

The truth that John is trying to tell his community, trying to tell us, is that the followers of Christ, the church, have something to offer that the rest of the world cannot give. That there is a light available to all people and it is known in the person of Jesus.

But sometimes we in the church get wrapped up in things that distract us from our real goal. We get concerned about ,who's theology is the right one or in doctrines and creeds meant to give us the right things to "believe." We want to make sure we are interpreting the "real truth" from scripture or get caught up in the heady, intellectual concerns that divide us.

Perhaps what we in the Church should really be doing, is what someone from our Saturday Lenten Book Study suggested, that we should be about teaching new ways of seeing.

In his book, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*, Richard Rohr talks about seeing with the "*third eye.*" He gives the example of 3 men who see a sunset. The first, like the vast majority of people, saw the beauty of it and enjoyed it. The second also saw the beauty but then thought about the ways of nature that produce such beauty, of the workings of the universe, the stars and planets. He used his imagination and intuition in addition to simply observing. The third man also saw and had these thoughts but in his ability to progress from seeing to explaining to "*tasting*", he also experienced a sense of awe in the "*underlying mystery, coherence and spaciousness*" that

connected him with everything else. This is what seeing with the 3rd eye is about. It is about developing an awakened consciousness that connects us with a deeper presence, the presence of God.

Perhaps, we *should* be about more than teaching people what they should think, or even how to act toward one another. Perhaps we should also be teaching more the practices of how to pray and meditate, of learning to be less reactive, and more attentive, of how to be better listeners, and how we might develop our own *awakened consciousness* that connects us with the presence of God.

If we can do this, then perhaps we might come to know the experience of the blind man in John's gospel. That in body, mind and spirit, we become open to the touch of the divine in our darkness, ready to listen to the voice of Christ and follow his instruction, and willing to find ourselves transformed and made whole, seeing with new and different eyes, with new and clearer perspectives, and sharing in the joy of that *bright, bright, sunshiny day* that is available to all, in the light we know in Christ. Amen.