

Scripture:

Psalm 146

John 9:1-41

“Spiritual blindness.”

“I was blind ---- and now I see ----- and a man named Jesus did it.”

In a nutshell that’s what the blind man says when asked about what happened to him today in John’s gospel.

“I was blind ---- and now I see ----- and a man named Jesus did it.” --- simple straightforward ----- and to the point ----- very little room for confusion.

Everyone else it seems ----- are far more confused and unsure about what happened or what to say --- and how to make sense of what happened.

In verse 2 ---- Jesus’ disciples ask him ---- “Rabbi, who sinned, this man of his parents, that he was born blind?” --- they’re a little unsure about things -- -- who sinned --- who caused this they ask.

And then there are the Pharisees ---- some of them are more concerned with when what happened happened ---- saying that a man of God would never heal on the Sabbath because the Sabbath was for rest --- verse 16 includes --- “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

And still other Pharisees ---- a little more open to God --- but still misguided --- concerned with who is a sinner and who isn’t say ---- “How can a sinner perform such signs?”

And then there are the man’s parents ---- who fearful of being banished from the synagogue --- say to the authorities --- “Go and ask our son yourself ---- don’t bother with us --- ask him --- he’ll tell you what happened.”

And they respond this way because as verse 22 says ---- “... they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.”

So there is fear ---- his parents.

Uncertainty --- the disciples.

Legalism ---- is this right according to traditions and laws --- some of the Pharisees.

Confusion --- other Pharisees ----- “How can a sinner heal?”

And then there is the man himself ---- “I was blind ---- and now I see ----- and a man named Jesus did it.”

The blind man ---- is the only one without any kind of agenda ---- the only one who has an open disposition and teachable spirit.

At its heart --- the passage has less to do with physical sight restored --- and more to do with an open teachable and receptive spirit.

The story reminds us that we are all sick and blind ----- we are all short sighted.

And the story reminds us that we all need Jesus.

We all need to be open to God acting as God so chooses to act.

The Pharisees --- at least some of them --- are uncomfortable with the idea of God being unpredictable in any way.

They want a domesticated God ----- a God who wouldn't heal on the Sabbath because the Sabbath is a day of rest.

They want things to fit into their little --- small minded --- tidy --- controlled order of things.

But of course God doesn't fit into anybody's little order of things --- and can't be contained or restricted by anything.

This passage shatters apart the idea of God working in ways that are only ever agreeable to our preconceptions of Him.

This passage invites us to look deep into the reality of all this world has to offer only to see Jesus right there in the thick of things transforming them.

Many things can blind us.

We can be blinded by ideologies like many of the Pharisees.

We can be blinded by dogma.

We can be blinded by fear --- or hatred.

We can be blinded by anxiety and also by laziness.

Many things can blind us --- and John's gospel today reminds us of spiritual blindness.

God passionately wants to invite and encourage us to see things clearly.

He not only wants us to be open to the realities of this world --- He also wants us to be open to the far greater truth and reality that is Jesus Christ.

This world is full of certain realities and even a few truths ---- but there is so much more happening under the surface --- and God wants us to go deeper and grow and mature in Christ.

There are the truths --- and the realities of this world ---- violence ---- hate --
- brokenness ----- fear ----- greed --- and so on ----- and of course there are
also some positive realities and truths in this world too ----- love ---
forgiveness --- compassion --- all of which are also real.

And then there is also the realm of faith and gospel truth --- not just a truth --
- like hatred can be true ---- or anger ---- but then there is also the truth of
the gospel.

The truth that amidst these other truths --- of fear --- greed ---- hate ---
brokenness --- violence and son on ---- and the positive ones -- love ---
compassion --- happiness ---- amidst these --- below these --- deeper and far
more real and transformative is the truth of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

This past week we saw once again --- in London --- that there are dark
realities and forces at play in the world.

And it's sad --- and hurtful --- sometimes even frustrating --- and for many disheartening --- and discouraging.

But we have nothing to fear or get antsy about.

And we have nothing to fear or get antsy about ---- precisely because underneath these dark realities ---- underneath fear and anger and violence is the far deeper and far greater truth of God's love.

Underneath --- at the very foundations of this world is the profound capacity and reality of benevolence --- compassion --- and God's saving and reconciling love for us.

And the gospel ---- opens our eyes to this --- and helps us re-focus.

And the blind man in John's gospel is a poignant example of a heart open to the deeper and greater truth that is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the end --- the man doesn't just say --- "I was blind ---- and now I see ----- and a man named Jesus did it."

In the end the man says something more like this ----- "I was blind ---- and now I see ----- and a man named Jesus ---- the Messiah did it."

In the end ----- he worships Jesus.

Verse 38 reads --- "'Lord I believe,' and he worshiped Jesus."

In the end the man's heart is opened and not just his eyes.

The truth of the gospel sinks deep below the surface of the junk of this world ----- it goes under --- and usurps the temporal --- and the ephemeral ---- the fleeting --- up and down --- flimsy ---- wishy washiness ---- of all that it means to be human.

Leonard Cohen had a great line --- many great lines --- gospel truth lines.

He said --- "Jesus sinks beneath our wisdom like a stone."

"Jesus sinks beneath our wisdom like a stone."

That to me is a profound and poetic way of expressing the gospel truth.

Jesus goes deeper --- He goes down underneath ---- all the ugliness of the world ----- sinking beneath all we know like a stone --- leading us to a greater truth than we could ever imagine on our own.

He goes deeper than greed ---- violence --- fear --- oppression ---- and so on.

He goes deeper and is more true ---- and more powerful --- and more transformative ----- than any of these things.

He goes under them and usurps them --- transforms them ---- reveals them to be nothing but passing fads --- glitches in time that fade way and are dissipated by God's love --- by God's sacrifice --- by the cross.

Jesus Christ hanging on the cross for us -----and remember it's God hanging there --- God didn't do something to Jesus God is hanging there as Jesus --- Christ on the cross is the great eye opener.

The great eye opener that sin --- and violence ---- and greed --- and fear --- and hate --- and all that is ugly and limiting and hindering ----- looses --- and falls apart --- stripped of all its power --- including death --- the thing we seem far to pre-occupied with much of the time.

All that is ugly --- and limiting and diminishing ----- death --- sin ---- evil --- ----- doesn't have the goods to stick it out --- and endure --- and persevere when God confronts it face to face.

Instead it just falls away --- limp and weak --- defeated ---- and God's love stands tall prevailing --- that's the message of the cross.

The world threw everything at God ----- sin --- death --- hatred ---- anger --- violence ---- everything at God ---- on the cross --- and God absorbed it and prevailed --- endured --- and came out the other side.

That's the message God wants to open eyes and hearts up to.

But everyone in John's gospel today seems to have it all mixed up --- they're concerned with so much smaller things --- they are all short sighted ---- except of course the blind the man himself.

He may be blind --- but he is never short sighted.

Spiritual blindness --- short sightedness --- is absolutely crippling.

The reality is ---- there is so much more to life than just this.

There is so much more to life than just what we see around us ----- and God wants us to start acting in ways that show we recognize --- and appreciate this.

God calls us to celebrate and share ---- our relationship with Him.

The relationship that perseveres through pain and suffering ----- the relationship that knows great joys and celebrations ----- the relationship that is governed by an immense and grand vision not limited by short sightedness or fear.

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.””

That's how Jesus responds to the disciples asking --- “Why was he born this way? --- Why is he blind? --- Why is he suffering? --- Did he do something to bring this upon himself? ---- “Did his parents do something to bring this upon him?”

His disciples ask point blank --- in verse 2 today ---- “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

And Jesus responds ---- in verse 3 saying ----- “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.””

We are all born the way we are born.

And we are all born ----- that God's works might be displayed in us.

Whether we are white or black --- or brown --- or yellow --- or red --- or pink --- or whatever colour --- we are born this way that God's works might be displayed in and through us.

Whether we're male female ---- tall short --- red haired ---- brown haired --- blond or have no hair --- whether we're straight --- or gay ---- or abstain --- like the eunuchs Jesus talks about in Matthew 19 ---- whether we're big boned small boned ---- heavy set or thin as a rail however we are born ---- all sinners --- we are born to display the glory of God.

And to be spiritually blind to this ---- grieves God.

That's what Jesus is talking about in John 9 today ----- spiritual blindness --- not who is better than who --- or why did this happen --- whose to blame --- how come some are this way and others that way.

We are born so that God can use us ----- employ us ---- reveal things in and through us --- and that's true whether we're blind --- tall short ---- male --- female ----- brown --- black --- white ----- smart --- not so smart ----- and so on.

We're not here to reason things away --- or figure everything out ---
 --- "Who sinned?"
 --- "What caused this?"
 --- "Can this be of God? --- Well I'm not sure it's Sunday you know --- God said rest today --- how could this be from God then?"

We are here for God to use us --- life isn't about everything fitting into our little categories.

"This happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." --- Jesus says in verse 3 today.

We're here for God expression ---- God development --- and God fulfillment ---- not self-expression ----- self development ---- or self fulfillment.

And until we come to this deep --- sink beneath our wisdom like a stone truth ---- we are only ever short sighted --- and spiritually blind.

"I was blind ---- and now I see ----- and a man named Jesus did it."

“I was blind ---- and now I see ----- and a man named Jesus --- the Messiah -
----- did it.” ----- is a confession of faith that ought to apply and ring true for
every single Christian.

Until we fully know this to be true ---- “I was blind ---- and now I see -----
and a man named Jesus --- the Messiah did it.” ----- we are spiritually blind.

Some of the Pharisees are blind to the miracle.

Some of the Pharisees are blinded because of ideological differences ---
“You can’t heal on a Sunday --- was the healer a sinner? ---- How can he do
that?”

Some people are blinded out of fear.

Others are blinded by laziness.

Some people are blinded by pride.

Others are blinded by intellect.

Everybody ---- every single person is blinded by something --- or
somethings ----- until they come to Christ --- until they arrive at the cross.

The cross is the great eye opener.

In a certain sense ---- this man born blind ----- is the prototype for every
single human being ever born.

We are all sinners --- and we are all blind until we come to Christ --- and
even then we can all still be pretty blind ---- only ever partially grasping the
entire Christ event.

The realities of this world --- greed --- hate --- violence ---- brokenness ---
need not blind us to the deeper reality of the cross.

And the deeper reality of the cross is that all of these things are merely
temporary and fleeting ----- whereas the gospel --- God’s love ----- is eternal.

God loves us ----- no matter what we do or don't do God still loves us.

No matter what --- God loves us and God acts for us ---- the cross --- taking on all that destroys and decays.

Until we realize that we cannot go it alone --- we are spiritually blind --- full of ourselves --- self centered ---- prideful --- foolish ----- not at all aware of the immense power of evil and sin --- misguided.

The cross reminds us --- God loves us.

And the cross reminds us that not even the immense power of evil and sin can separate us from God's unending love.

If we have any sense of the harsh realities of this world and still think we can go it alone --- than we are totally unaware of the power of the forces at work in the world.

The world ---- evil and sin ---- will cream us ----- if we remain spiritually blind to the saving truth of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual blindness is about being self centered and short sighted --- mislead ----- and only ever seeing a very small and limited horizon.

Spiritual blindness --- blocks us from seeing the greater and bigger --- and deeper and far more beautiful and expansive back drop that is God's love and God's great rescue plan in Jesus Christ.

"I was blind ---- and now I see ----- and a man named Jesus did it."

"I was blind ---- and now I see ----- and a man named Jesus --- the Messiah did it."

Open the eyes of my heart Lord.

I want so see Jesus high and lifted up shining in the Light of His glory.

May we all join in the chorus of the man born blind --- "I was blind but now I see and a man named Jesus --- the Messiah --- did it."

Amen.