

### “Blind Sighted”

I would like you to take a quick look at an image. Some of you may have seen this image before please don't say anything when you see it just remember your first impression of it. Here it is [show the Ruben Vase quickly.] Now that you have seen it someone tell me the one thing that you saw [listen for vase or two men in profile]. How many others of you saw what that person saw? Did anyone see something different? How many saw that image? Did anyone see both images simultaneously? This image is almost part of popular culture it is so common thus for some it is hard not to see both. For those who saw only one likeness in the image, and for those who can remember seeing the image for the first time, it is compelling to note that we all looked at the same image and yet saw different things at first glance.

Last week in my sermon “Come and See” I noted close to the end of the sermon a common phrase about seeing. Does anyone remember what it was? Yes, I repeated the old saw “Seeing is believing.” In that instance, I was attempting to reenforce our weekly act of coming to see Jesus again as if for the first time. Coming to see Jesus in our weekly worship can help us stay centered in our faith. Seeing is believing can also be a profound problem if our certainty about our sight makes us blind to other possibilities.

In today's Gospel reading we hear about Jesus curing a man blind from birth. For some people the miracle part of the story may be the hardest to believe, because modern people don't believe in miracles, or because we have trivialized the meaning of a miracle. As an example of the latter how many times will we hear during March Madness that a player made a miraculous shot, or that an underdog's defeating of a favored team was a miracle? But that aside, what I find troubling about this pericope is the behavior of his neighbors, the disciples, and the Pharisees.

At the very beginning of the reading John tells us that Jesus is walking along and encounters a blind man. The disciples' first response is not one of compassion, but of fault finding. They want to know if the man is blind because of his sin or the sin of his parents. His blindness must be a punishment for someone's sin, they think. You and I might say that is just the ignorance of ancient beliefs showing up and no one would do that today. Yet, how many times do we hear of someone's misfortune and we immediately think they deserved it because of their actions. For example, if someone has a serious car crash we remember that he was always a fast driver a crash was bound to happen sooner or later. Or she smoked cigarettes no wonder she got cancer. We try to explain other's misfortunes in order to make ourselves feel safer. I don't do that, so it won't happen to me.

Jesus disabuses the disciples of that notion, indicating that the man's blindness is not a punishment but an opportunity to reveal God's works. He then cures the man's blindness with spit and dirt. Something that Jesus did in

one other other gospel accounts.<sup>1</sup> As dramatic as the cure is, it is the reaction of the people and the Pharisees that takes up the rest of the account. The blind man's neighbors and others can't believe their eyes. Indeed, many think it is not the beggar they knew but someone like him. Despite seeing the results of the miracle, they cannot believe their eyes and feel they must come up with another explanation. While he does his best to convince them of what has happened to him they will not buy it. So they take him to see the Pharisees.

When the religious professionals get involved, it becomes yet another issue. While they may accept the possibility of a miracle, the fact that it happened on the Sabbath is a big problem. Performing a miracle on the Sabbath is work when work is prohibited. The Sabbath is to be kept holy in remembrance that God rested after creating the world. (I'm sure some of you remember Blue laws that prohibited making certain purchases on Sundays which was the Christian take on this law.) The Pharisees were so stuck on the letter of the law. They could not see that a miraculous cure must come from God and therefore could not be an infringement on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees are so flustered by the situation they fall back into disbelief in the miracle. They seek out the man's parents to verify he was born blind. While the parents do confirm this, they are so afraid of the Pharisees they put the spotlight back on their son. They tell the Pharisees that they know nothing about his cure. The Pharisees call the man born blind to testify again, and he proceeds to scold them for not believing. He even has the courage to teach them about miraculous works. But they are so certain of what they know that they cannot see the truth in his words; truth that is obvious to us. So, they drive him out of the synagogue and into the arms of Jesus.

The man did not know much about his healer but now he learns that Jesus is the Son of Man and he worships him. Jesus uses the moment to expound on spiritual and actual blindness. In one of his mind-bending monologues he says, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." We do not believe Jesus would make someone physically blind. He wants us to be aware that the certainty that we have may indeed be our blind side. Our certainty could be the place where we have lost the ability to discern something new. We develop what psychologists call confirmation bias. We only believe what confirms our strongly held beliefs. To confirm our beliefs, we will go so far as to say that black is white and white is black because it confirms what we want to believe about ourselves and the world. Even when we are presented with absolute truth as in this case when a man was healed and healing only comes from God. The man's neighbors and the Pharisees must seek another answer. They resort to calling the man an imposter or, even more outrageously, they contend that his healing was an act of evil all because it occurred on the Sabbath. The only one who sees the truth is the man who was born blind. The others have lost their ability to see.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 8:22-26

The disciples fade into the background after their initial accusation of sin. Perhaps you and I as onlookers are supposed to identify with the disciples. How often do we not see what is true? How often do we try to explain away the truly miraculous, while calling the exceptional but plausible a miracle. We need to realize, as did St. Paul, that “now we see through a glass, darkly;”<sup>2</sup> Our vision is clouded by our assumptions, predilections, desires, and what the world tells us to believe. We have to recognize that we are all blind from birth. We are only able to truly see through the gradual opening of the eyes of our souls through the love and healing of God in Christ Jesus. It is then that we can see that everyone of us is a child of God. It is then that we can see how we are called into the healing work of Jesus for any and every person in the world without exception. Only when we can see every other person as a beloved child of God, even those we do not like, cannot stand or whom we think is utterly wrong in every way about everything; only then can we say that we were blind but now we see. Only then is our sight made clear. For it is then that the love of Christ brightens the dark glass and we can see everyone and everything as he does.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12 KJV