

Our gospel story of the blind man who was healed by Jesus is long and convoluted. I am going to summarize it as we go deeper into what this story might have for us. It starts with Jesus encountering a man who was blind from birth and the FIRST THING the disciples ask is whether this man has sinned or his parents. It was a common belief at the time that illness came because of your sins. But Jesus says neither and says that this man was blind so that God's work might be revealed in him.

Jesus then heals the man making mud from dirt on the ground and putting it on the man's eyes and telling him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He does and he can see! And this is where the trouble really begins – his neighbors and those around can't believe their eyes and they start to fuss about it and argue. Is this really the blind guy who used to beg? It can't be. It must be someone else. The man says – I am he. They ask how it happened and he tells them a what Jesus did.

They – these neighbors and others – now take the man to the Pharisees who also want to know how he was healed and the man tells them as well. However, since the healing happened on the Sabbath, they say Jesus cannot be from God. He must be a sinner.

They are divided and when they ask the healed man what he says about Jesus – he calls him a prophet.

Next the Jews call the man's parents because they do not believe he was blind. The parents confirm that he was blind, but won't say how it happened. Ask him yourself they say and so they bring the man back again. They want the man to confirm that Jesus is a sinner but the man says he doesn't know. What he does know is that he was blind and that now he can see. **They want him to tell the story again and I love his response** – Why do you want to hear this again? Do you want to become his disciples?

This gets them really mad and they start in about how they are disciples of Moses and that they do not know where Jesus comes from. The man who was healed teaches them oh so well. He says, we do not know where he comes from, but he healed me and we know that God does not listen to sinners. If he were not from God he could do nothing. This really gets them mad and they drive him out of the synagogue.

When Jesus hears the man has been thrown out, Jesus comes to him and tell him that he is the Son of Man and the man believes. Jesus says I came that those who do not see may see and that those who see may become blind. Some Pharisees hear this and ask "Surely we are not blind?"

There are two parts of this story that really have my attention.

The first is what one commentator pointed out which is that out of all the reactions that people had to the blind man's healing, none were celebrations – not from his neighbors, not from those who saw him every day and not from the religious authorities. We aren't even sure about how his parents felt since they were so scared of what might happen to them. A man who has never seen before in his life can now see and no one except the man seems to be happy about it. That's a tragedy. No one can see to celebrate the good work that Jesus is doing among them.

The second is that comment from some of the Pharisees at the end of the passage when they say - "Surely we are not blind?" because that gives me hope that they might be willing to consider their blindness because maybe just maybe that will lead to them to being able to see.

And the questions I ask myself now – how am I blind? How am I missing God’s work in the world? What am I not celebrating? Am I even willing to consider that I am blind?

I hope that we all would be willing to ask these questions of ourselves as scary as they are because no one likes to admit they are blind - that they don’t know. They are challenging questions to contemplate in this time of the coronavirus pandemic. Much easier to focus on who did what wrong. Should China have done more?. Is it the local government or the federal government at fault? And who bought up all the toilet paper and the Purell?

It is not wrong to figure out how and why things went happened, but when we forget to look at how God is working among us, we can become blind. We are all blind in ways we don't understand, aren't we? Sometimes we become so accustomed to our blindness that it takes a shake up to bring us to a new way of seeing. These last few weeks have certainly provided such a shake up. I want to share two ways I have been able to see as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

The first was when I came across an article¹ about the unintended climate benefits of the Corona virus shutdowns. There were pictures of the usually murky water in Venice’s canals looking clear now that there hadn’t been all the boat traffic going up and down. The nitrogen dioxide cloud that had been parked over China in January seemed to evaporate in February. I was astonished that clearing could have happened so quickly. I have been upset about how much damage we have done to our planet and was pretty convinced that we were too late to turn it around. But that article lifted my blindness and gave me hope.

The second was the response to last week’s service. I have resisted trying to stream our Sunday service before. I knew we couldn’t do professional filming and didn’t think people would want to watch video from a stationery cell phone. But that is what we had to do last week and I have had several people who have not been able to make it to church in recent months and even years, who said that either watching the video live or afterwards made them feel connected to St. Peter’s and were grateful to be able to worship. And so my eyes have been opened in another way.

In the midst of this Coronavirus mess, I have been given gifts and I am grateful that I have been able to receive them.

Where are the places, times and ways that we are blind? How are we blind as a society, as family members, as colleagues, as friends? How are we blind as those who follow Jesus? How can we be open to Jesus’ movement in this world?

Will our blindness be lifted quickly as it was with the blind man, or will it take a lot of back and forth with us quarrelling and fussing along the way as the Pharisees did hopefully to come to a place where we can ask the question – surely we are not blind and perhaps go on from there? In whichever way it happens, the hope is that our eyes will be opened. No matter how bad this gets, know God is with us and God is working. Trust in God’s goodness and look! Choose not to turn a blind eye to God’s goodness because God’s love for us endures even in the midst of a pandemic. Let us all pray continuously for the ability to open our eyes and see how God is ready to heal our sight and then go and proclaim God’s working in the present moment in the world.

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/science/environment/coronavirus-shutdowns-have-unintended-climate-benefits-n1161921>