

## **“God Is with You in the Dark”**

**John 9:13-17, 24-25, 35-39**

During the Reformation in Europe 500 years ago, the initial churches to break off from the Catholic Church – the Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, etc., maintained infant baptism because they believed God is doing the action in baptism to adopt us and then it’s up to us to raise our children with opportunities to learn what it means to be a baptized child of God.

Later on in the Reformation, the Baptists and non-denominational, independent churches believed you had to be old enough to make the decision for yourself when to be baptized. That resulted in junior high age baptisms which is parallel to our confirmation classes to prepare our children to affirm their baptisms.

No matter when we are baptized, throughout our lives together we have spiritual experiences or what some call “emotional highs” or “born again” experiences that intensify the love and light of Christ. Sometimes colors are more vivid . . . the trees, sky, and sound of birds more beautiful. During my backpacking days at Sky Ranch Bible Camp in Colorado, we called it a “Rocky Mountain High”. The heavens and God just felt closer and all around and in us.

On the other hand, when the sun goes down or we’re caught in the middle of a white-out of blowing snow above the tree line on some ridge, or our raft is caught sideways in churning white water, the darkness or the inability to see right in front of you can cause anxiety and fear. When we are in Christ, when we have faith, it’s not that we will never experience fear and darkness again. Rather, in the midst of the darkness, in the midst of our blindness, we have the light of hope and healing.

We view the darkness in a new way – as something that is temporary, that does not define us, and from which we are safe.

This week, we look at a miracle that John relates in which Jesus gives sight to a blind man. Although the healing was truly miraculous, the most religious of the group – the Pharisees – were not impressed. The reason is because they were themselves blind – not physically but spiritually.

Spiritually or physically, have you ever had a dark place in your life that was healed by Jesus? What was it like to see that darkness turn to light?

I was thinking about how sometimes dark places can stay dark throughout our lives and so we learn to adjust and cope with them.

Here at Divinity, we have A.A. groups, an Al Anon group, a widow's support group and other ministries to help us navigate our dark places.

The man who was born blind had no support group. Even his parents had abandoned him. Both Jesus' disciples and the Pharisees assumed what most people believed 2000 years ago – that his blindness was caused either by his sin or since it was from birth – the sins of his parents. They believed in a wrathful, angry, and judgmental God that they feared.

Some of our older generation had the experience of going to Catholic grade schools run by nuns who put the fear of God in them as opposed to a laid back teacher like me. Whether it be in the classroom, the meal room, or locking their sleeping room from the outside, God was portrayed as a mean old man who would tell the nuns to punish them for any disobedience.

The Pharisees were keepers of the law that believed a wrathful God would severely judge everyone who sinned. So, it's not at all surprising that Jesus' disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Why was the man sightless? Why was he living in darkness?

Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him".

John 9:4-5 . . . <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Do you believe in a wrathful, angry, and judgmental God that you fear?

Or do you believe in a loving, graceful, and forgiving God who is the light of the world?

Are we so busy trying to obey the law and meet the expectations of others and our culture that we become totally focused on ourselves and fulfilling our own needs?

Or are we seeing and experiencing and receiving the light of Christ that sends us out, guides us out to serve and love others following the example of Christ?

In our Bible study, Max Lucado asked this very insightful question.

"Have you ever felt spiritually blind to something – whether blind to Christ himself, blind to a sin area in your life, or blind to the power of God? If so, what moment, person or experience helped you see more clearly?"

To which I responded, "Is it not one purpose of spouses to point out what we are blind to?" The other person in my life that really enjoys pointing out what I'm blind to is my 35-year-old daughter.

But are not those people who God has put into our lives to point out what we are blind to, gifts from God to help us grow spiritually and to help us grow all of our relationships by pointing out what we are saying or doing wrong from their perspective.

The question becomes, are we willing to listen and then are we willing to change? Sometimes!

How else is light brought into our darkness? Worshiping together. Singing praises to God together. Hearing God's Word together. Being in a Bible study or support group together. The hours of training to become a Stephen Minister. The church is a community of faith that's about bringing light into our darkness. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world". It is that light that we welcome into our lives and that we share with others.

But there will always be those who question our faith, those who question that Jesus is the light of the world.

John 9:13-17 . . . <sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. <sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." <sup>16</sup>Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. <sup>17</sup>So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The Pharisees didn't believe it. They questioned him and his parents. They saw Jesus as a threat who was turning people away from the law they were teaching. Healing on the Sabbath was going too far.

The Sabbath or day of rest was important to those who followed Jewish law. When Jesus made clay for the blind man's eyes, what he was doing was equivalent to kneading dough, which was one of 39 acts forbidden on the Sabbath. Jesus miraculously heals the man anyway while the Pharisees totally miss the point.

Matthew 23:27-28 . . . <sup>27</sup>Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. <sup>28</sup>So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

For Jesus and for us, a hypocrite is someone who doesn't practice what they teach. Their actions don't match what they say or how they appear.

Today, many are quick to judge the church as hypocritical and turned in on itself, only caring about keeping the doors open for its members.

Here at Divinity, we have always been very intentional about serving our neighbors, our community, and through the ELCA ministries, the entire world. We seek to live out our faith everyday as the Body of Christ, as the hands and feet of Christ in the world. We will not be hypocrites.

We will be like Jesus. One of the most beautiful parts of the story of Jesus healing the blind man is when Jesus goes after him at the end. The now seeing man was shunned by his synagogue, community, and parents. In a moment of what must have been pure loneliness for the man, Jesus appears before him, proving that he does see us in our plight.

John 9:35-38 . . . <sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

<sup>36</sup>He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." <sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." <sup>38</sup>He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

The fact that Jesus heard, "they had thrown him out" indicates that he and his disciples had already left the area and continued on their way. Jesus could have considered his work finished, but he came back when he heard of the man's plight.

What does his concern for the once blind man say about how Jesus feels about you? Jesus comes back for us. He doesn't abandon us. He's all around us and in us. Often, when we see God, we realize he sees us.

When I stare into Colton's, my 8-year-old grandson's dark brown eyes, sometimes I see darkness and evil, but most of the time I see God and light staring back at me.

Mostly, God isn't that obvious. It is only in hindsight, looking back on our lives that we see God's presence. Then we realize that God has always been a lamp for our feet and a light on our path. We see Jesus as the light bringer, guiding us on the path he wants us to follow.

May the peace of God . . .

#793 – Be Thou My Vision