

This week we read about the next to last of Jesus' signs or miracles.

In contrast to the usual healing miracle Jesus approaches a man blind from birth rather than the other way around. The blind man has not asked for help but neither does he refuse what Jesus offers. The disciples ask how sin relates to his condition and Jesus replies that it does not, that the man "was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We might question his statement that the man was born blind for this purpose because it would imply that God purposely afflicted someone with a disability which doesn't seem right and might lead to the impression that illness, accident, or tragedy happen for a reason ... which is not the case. This is a one-off, John has shaped this story so that Jesus uses as a metaphor for what it really means to see. A stark contrast will be drawn between the blind man who gradually comes to know and see Jesus and the Pharisees who refuse to accept the evidence of their eyes and do not see Jesus for who he really is.

We are all blind from birth. Yes, we most of us were baptized as babies and we may have been brought up going to church, we may have had religious instruction, we may have had parents who prayed with us and who talked about and even demonstrated their faith but there comes a time usually after confirmation, that we make a decision to continue our spiritual journey or let it lapse. If we let it lapse it means that we have not seen Jesus for ourselves and we remain blind. You just have to look around at who's in church today – well okay – who would have been in church today - to realize that most of the children who were brought up here are not active members of the church, which by the way is consistently true throughout the mainline churches.

Some of you have heard the old joke about how to get rid of bats in the belfry – just confirm them (or even baptize them) and you will never see them again. I suppose I should have tried this on the squirrels.

Our spiritual disconnect, our "blindness" to use the example of today's gospel, usually persists until some life event makes us realize that this business of life is hard to do alone. No matter who we love, no matter who loves us, no matter what our support system, there comes a time when we are terribly, frighteningly alone and that's where by grace, we meet Jesus.

Learning to see, becoming "unblind" is a messy business, Jesus made mud with spit and dirt and rubbed it in the blind man's eyes. The man born blind doesn't understand who Jesus is in one encounter, He requires several interactions before he says "Tell me so that I may believe." When he is first challenged by the Pharisees he refers to Jesus as a prophet, much like the Samaritan woman at the well in our reading from last week. The man born blind is on the right track but he is not there yet. Then the Pharisees come to him a second time, demanding that he "Give Glory to God." and questioning the source of Jesus' power. The man who had

been blind argues with them saying that if this man [Jesus] were not from God, he could do nothing.” The Pharisees reject what the man says and drive him out – either away from their presence or out of the synagogue. When Jesus hears that the man born blind had been driven out he does not leave the man hanging, Jesus finds him and invites him to see who he is. The man opens himself to Jesus’ revelation and when Jesus says he is the “Son of Man” and the man responds “Lord, I believe” and worships him. In that moment the man has indeed given glory to God. He can see.

Likewise for most of us that come to Jesus moment is more of a process because trust takes time. We need time to let the words of the psalms sink into our souls, time to learn the difference and accept the difference between knowing that God is with us in good times and in bad and that God does not rescue us from the bad times but is simply present. Furthermore it takes time to let God into the nooks and crannies of our lives, time to know that Jesus loves us even in our “sin-sick souls” (From “There Is a Balm in Gilead). Furthermore it’s not just about our personal relationship with Jesus, since as I have said before “there is no such thing as a Christian without community. So learning to see is also about our developing a relationship with his body the church – it means, as our stewardship theme says, “Participating in our community if faith through giving.”

It means learning to live with, work with, and appreciate our fellow parishioners whether it is setting up and cleaning up coffee hour, reading the lessons in church, volunteering in the thrift shop, or pledging to support our mission and ministry. Sometimes we have to work really hard to remember that Jesus loves them to. Yes, Jesus loves all of us. And then what happens in our life outside of church when we do find ourselves becoming more involved? Our family, friends, and co-workers might not recognize us the way the neighbors and those who had seen the blind man before as a beggar weren’t sure that they recognized the man born blind. Worse they might feel threatened and react negatively to our new-found faith. I got a lot of Saturday Night Live “Church Lady” jokes when I first became involved in a church.

Moreover we do change when we let Jesus into our hearts. We do change, maybe not all at once but when we start to see other perspectives. Our compassion for those on the margins may increase; like Jesus breaking the Law to heal on the Sabbath we may have more sympathy for breaking or bending the law when people’s lives or well-being are at stake. We might have less tolerance for jokes that put down people because of their race, religion, or ethnicity, ability or disability. We may find our personal values being clarified and challenged. You see how this is more of a process than a one-and-done event? And like any growing process it has its fits and starts, its steps forward and its steps backward.

We will run into our own levels of resistance as trying to follow Christ as his words push our boundaries and we will try to set limits on just how much we are willing to change. For

example I am conflicted every time I call the police to have a homeless person removed from our property. Yes, the practical logic is all well and good, and it is my responsibility as a leader to protect the integrity of the community including our buildings. And yet I hear Jesus' warning "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of, you did not do it to me." (Matt 25:45b) So our own will, the sense of what values and beliefs make us who we are as a person can be challenged by Jesus' teaching. When this happens it's a time for patience with ourselves, time for prayer, for examining what we are trying to defend, and time for patience with the grace by which God is working in us and time to recognize that resistance can be the source of sin. Like I said learning to see is a messy business and a lifelong process.

During Lent, particularly this Lent when we are inhibited from indulging in our usual distractions this is an opportune time to reflect on where we see Jesus as well as where we don't see Jesus and to ask yourself; "Do I believe in the Son of Man?"

Amen