

Our Religious “Blind-Spots”

[Text - John Chapter 9]

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March 26, 2017

“As Jesus walks along, he sees a man blind from birth. His disciples ask him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’” [Kind of make you wonder whose vision is deficient in this instance!] From the disciples’ religious perspective, this man isn’t seen as a *person* in need of compassion; but rather a *problem* in need of an explanation. If something bad happens to someone, many people - even today - often want to assign some kind of explanation, or blame. “There must be some hidden reason for this; *someone* must have done *something* wrong; this must be part of God’s greater plan!” That was the predominant viewpoint in Jesus’ day, even among his own disciples. So Jesus comes to shed a new light on the subject of human suffering, and on the issue of Divine Intention.

Jesus declares, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned. He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” Now this is **not** to say that God made this particular person blind, so that twenty years later, Jesus could come along and heal him! What it says, is that our Divine Source of Compassion desires is that works of compassion be carried-out on behalf of every person who needs them. Jesus says, “I am the light of the world!” And what that Light of Christ consistently reveals, is that God is *Love!* And those who seek to serve God, will do so by showing love and grace, compassion and kindness to anyone who is suffering or struggling, isolated or lost.

Unfortunately, this message of Divine Compassion and Grace doesn’t mesh with the rigid beliefs and judgmental practices of some of the religious leaders in First Century Israel [or in Twenty-first Century America]. So when the Pharisees hear that Jesus

has healed a person on the Sabbath, they try to turn it into a theological problem: “Our religious law says, you shall not do any work on the Sabbath. Jesus made mud, and worked a healing on the Sabbath; therefore, Jesus is a sinner, and not from God!” Yet Jesus declares, “I am the light of the world!” And what Jesus brings to light, is that the Sabbath day - like every day, every hour, and every moment - is the *perfect* time to perform God’s compassionate and life-affirming work.

The blindness that Jesus comes to heal, isn’t necessarily physical. It’s also that spiritual blindness, which tries to separate days into “holy” and “less-than-holy”; and which categorizes people as being either “saints” or “sinners” - those who are worthy, and those who are *unworthy* of God’s love, and of our own. So perhaps the deepest darkness that Jesus comes to disperse, is our own bleak refusal to see and to love others, as we see and love ourselves.

In today’s story, the man who was blind not only receives physical sight; he also receives spiritual insight. He becomes *enlightened!* He goes from sitting and begging for his livelihood, to standing and claiming his life - as a loved and restored child of the Holy One. He no longer relies on others to tell him what the world - or God - is like. Instead, he clearly sees it for himself. And regardless of what his neighbors, or family, or the “religious experts” tell him, this man “knows what he knows”: “I once was blind, but now I see! And what caused this amazing transformation, is that this wonderfully compassionate person named Jesus saw me, cared about me, touched me, and conveyed to me the Good News of Divine acceptance and wholeness, love and grace!”

Clearly seeing, and boldly claiming that Jesus has completely changed his life, the man who was once blind finds himself being put-out of the synagogue *because* of his new insight. Apparently,

his expanded vision of Life - and of the Divine Source of Life - no longer fits the narrow parameters of blind religious rules and traditions; so he's immediately expelled from his own faith community. And while this may seem rather harsh to us today, the truth is that similar expulsions still take place in present-day places of worship. There are even some among us who have experienced this - myself included. At a certain point in our lives, we dare to claim a more open and enlightened understanding of God's gracious welcome and inclusion, for ourselves and for others; only to find ourselves condemned and dismissed, often from the very faith communities in which we were raised. The *Good News* is, that even when our own communities, friends, or families reject us, our Divine Source of Love and Grace will *never* abandon or forsake us.

John writes, "When Jesus heard that the leaders of the synagogue had driven the man out, *Jesus went and found him!*" What a beautiful act of compassion - to go and find this rejected child of God, and to assure him that it wasn't God who had done the rejecting. In fact, it was God's Anointed One who had helped this man to truly see in the first place; and it is this Anointed One who is now inviting him to see and experience *all* of Life in a new and wonderfully expansive way.

Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world!" Jesus also says, "*You* are the light of the world!" You are! We are! Everyone who sees and responds to the light and love of Jesus Christ, has the power to let that same light and love shine in them and through them. This is why those remarkable things that Jesus did so long ago, still make a tremendous difference today - because you and I, as the Living, Loving Body of Christ, can still make a tremendous difference:

By allowing that Divine Light to open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts;

By raising-up that Light to warmly welcome *all* people, whoever or wherever they may be;

By really seeing others, and ourselves, in the Light of God's extraordinary love and amazing grace - a love and grace that seeks us, finds us, heals us, and will always hold us - safe and secure.