

It Just Dawned on Me....

[Text - John Chapter 9]

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Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in their Gospel accounts, tell several stories about Jesus' healing ministry. Most of these stories are told quickly and with little detail. Jesus is walking down the road, encounters someone with a need, reaches out with compassion and healing, and then they continue on their way. Short and sweet and to the point - just like my sermons! Well actually, a *sermon* is more in the style of the fourth Gospel writer, John.

The Gospel attributed to John was written some twenty to thirty years after the first three; and John's method, is to choose a specific story about Jesus, and elaborate on the deeper meaning *behind* that story. A good example, is last Sunday's narrative about Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. This morning, we have another one, where John devotes an entire chapter to tell of Jesus healing a man who was born blind. It's a story so packed with symbolism and theological reflections, that I condensed it by half for this morning's reading; yet it still provides *hours* of preaching material. But don't panic, in order to keep it short and sweet and to the point, I've narrowed-down the focus to two basic images that I believe are key in the telling of this story.

For John, the significance of Jesus healing this individual, is expressed in two specific images: *Light* and *Seeing*. Jesus proclaims, "I am the *light* of the world!" And the man who is healed declares, "I once was blind, but now I *see!*" *Light* and *Seeing* are crucial images in this story; and they lead us to a crucial issue, which is, "What difference might it make to you and me today, that Jesus opened the eyes of the blind some 2,000 years ago?" Let's take a look, and see what we can see!

As Jesus walks down the road, he sees a man who was born blind. His disciples ask him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" In the disciples' view this man is seen, not as person who needs compassion, but as a problem that needs an explanation. If something bad happens to someone, many people - even today - will try to assign some kind of explanation, or blame. "There must be an underlying 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. Yet Jesus comes to shed a entirely new light on the subject of human suffering, and on the issue of Divine Intention.

Jesus says, "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 or thirty years later, Jesus could come along and heal him. What it says, is that the Divine Source of *Compassion* desires and intends that works of compassion be done for each person who needs them. Jesus says, "I am the light of the world!" And what that Light of Christ clearly reveals, is that God is a God of *Love!* And those who seek to serve God, will *do* so by showing love and compassion for anyone who is suffering or struggling, isolated or lost.

Unfortunately, this message of Divine Love and Compassion doesn't mesh with the harsh and judgmental beliefs 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 would seek to separate days into "holy" and "less-than-holy" - and which categorizes people as being "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.

The good thing about *light*, is that it helps us see things we might otherwise miss. And in this 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 God. He is no longer relying 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, wholeness, and grace!"

That's what happens when the Light of Christ shines brightly upon us. And there's even more to the story! Seeing clearly, 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 God - no longer fits the narrow parameters of blind religious rules and traditions; so he is summarily dismissed from his own faith community. And while this may seem extremely

harsh to you and me, the truth is that similar expulsions still take place in present-day synagogues and churches. There are even some among us who have experienced this. At a certain point, we dared to claim a more open and enlightened understanding of God's gracious welcome and inclusion, for ourselves or for others; only to find ourselves discounted and dismissed, often from the very faith communities in which we were raised. The *Good News* is, that even when our own communities, or friends, or families reject us, the God of Love and Grace will *never* abandon or forsake us.

John writes that, "When Jesus heard that the leaders of the synagogue had driven him 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 to experience *all* of Life in a new and wonderfully expansive way.

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

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

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

And 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, empowers us, and shows us the way.