

Sight and Insight

One of the biggest criticisms Christianity faces by modern, scientific, sophisticated folks, like us, is about the miracles that Jesus performs.

None more so than restoring the sight of a man born blind.

We modern folks tend to pooh pooh such tales as ancient magic or the superstitions of a gullible people.

And yet, as with all things Jesus, we frequently miss the point, especially when it comes to these miracle stories.

Especially when it comes to the blind being able to see.

Today's gospel, like last week's, is a long story!

Some may wish we did some editing and summarizing rather than plow through the whole thing!

But we plow through because, just like last week's beautiful story of the Samaritan woman, today's story is full of priceless jewels, if only we'll walk slowly enough to spot them.

Because while on its surface this is a story of a blind man cured, in fact, it's the story about those who think they can see, yet who are in fact truly blind.

The real miracle that Jesus pulls off isn't so much restoring the physical ability to see.

It's that he takes blind folks like us: blind to the wonder of creation, blind to the interconnection between the sacred and the ordinary, blind to the unfolding of God's kingdom on this good earth, and slowly helps us begin to see.

Like that other blind man cured in a different gospel, we at first see only vaguely and sporadically these glories of God's mysteries.

But if we hang in there with Jesus, our vision slowly improves, and then the real miracles begin to happen.

That smelly bum hanging out at the street corner?

If you can look at him through Jesus eyes, why, lo and behold, he turns out to be Our Lord himself, standing in our midst!

Life constantly throws its slings and arrows our way.

Like the current upheaval throughout our country, as the vulnerable are being attacked.

Like this week's floods that've left many in the dark.

Like the dogs of war racing from horizon to horizon.

And in our blindness, we often react to such things with anger, resentment or fear.

But with Jesus eyes, perhaps we might begin to see these very real crises — as soul shaping events.

Events that can change us in positive ways.

Making us more fully human.

Events that can turn us into people who, because we know suffering, can extend mercy and compassion to others who also suffer.

So when we feel that life is spinning out of control, and in our desperation seek to hold on tight to life as we think it ought to be, when we see through Jesus eyes, it's possible to let it all go.

To trust the wild wind that is God's Spirit — letting her take us where she will.

There's an old movie about a man blind from birth who receives his sight as an adult.

You'd think he'd be overjoyed!

But in fact, the gift of sight nearly drives him crazy!

Because the only way he knows how to relate to the world — is as a blind person.

When it comes to faith in Jesus, we are all that man born blind.

Like him, we know how to deal with the world — on our terms.

Terms so ingrained that hardly anyone questions them.

Like, brave people die for their country, but only crazy people die for their faith.

Like, belief in God is all well and good — as long as it's a private affair.

But please, don't bring God into a debate about food stamps or universal health care or a guaranteed minimum income.

Please don't suggest that God has anything to say about how we organize our political, economic or social lives!

We are all, to one degree or another, consumed with the need to be in control.

To protect ourselves.

To band together in tribes so we can be safe against whatever "them" may be out there.

And here comes Jesus — showing us not so much in word as in deed — that real life is found in breaking down the walls that separate people.

That real life exists in freely giving ourselves to one another.

That the gospel is far more reflected in the welcoming message found on the statue of Liberty ("Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses...") than the current effort to exclude and deport as many non-white people as possible.

That real life is consumed with forgiveness, kindness and gentleness.

Not revenge, hate or nationalism.

So it's no wonder that when we are invited into something as amazing as the life Jesus calls "eternal life," it seems as if we too must almost go crazy before we can adapt to this entirely new way of living.

Perhaps that's why for so many people, it takes a real crisis in life.

The death of one deeply loved.

An injury or accident or cancer.

Something big that shakes us out of our love affair with blind adoration of the ways of this world.

For only then can we begin to catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God.

And what we see, when at long last we begin to see, is that sin is not so much your peccadillos or mine.

It's not so much the bad stuff we do.

Sin is our refusal to face the fact that Jesus is the Life of the world.

That all life is taken up in him.

Redeemed by him.

Saved through him.

Existing because of him.

Not once we die.

But today.

Now!

Out of that refusal flows all of the lesser sins of the world.

One example is the many ministers who've been upbraided by congregants for preaching the Beatitudes — because, according to those upset parishioners, the Beatitudes are woke and weak!

Sin is our chronic insistence on defining what is good and who is evil.

Failing to recognize our own innate brokenness.

Our own blindness.

Sin is our failure to see in Jesus the face and character and heart of the Living God.

And our failure to give ourselves over to that truth.

Jesus, you see, doesn't come to make us nice, he comes to make us new!

This journey, from blindness to sight, is a journey from unbelief, to belief.

And from belief to faith.

And from faith to a new consciousness — about the very nature of reality.

A life of unbelief just sees what's obvious: a dog eat dog world — where we better learn to bite!

But belief begins to see beyond the obvious.

Even if it's just a hint that life must be more than "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

Faith begins to put meat on the bones of belief, as we actually try to start living differently, more generously, more intuitively.

And that's when we notice the often slow awakening of a new consciousness.

One that peeks behind the curtain of what seems to be real – and into the profound mysteries of the Really Real.

The poet puts it like this:

“If the eyes of perception
were cleansed,
we would see things
as they are –
infinite.”
W. Blake.

He expands on this thought in another place, where he urges those with eyes....

“To see a World
in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven
in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity
in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity
in an hour.” Id.

Perhaps during these days when our nation appears to be coming apart at the seams, when the uncertainty of daily life screams from

every headline, perhaps now is the time to sit for awhile, and ask for the grace of real insight.

To ask for the humility to be open to this gracious Creator of all things.

Just for today, may we, as Paul exhorts: "live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true."

+amen