

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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One thing Jesus is most known for in his ministry is healing. In Mark's gospel, Jesus healed demon possessed individuals, a girl who was dead, and a hemorrhaging woman. Today, we met a man who was blind. Before we get too far into the reading, there is an important word of caution. With all the talk about Jesus healing the deaf, the blind, and the lame, it's easy for us to assume that Jesus prefers people who do not live with a disability. Religious people have used such assumptions to terrorize those with disabilities and heaped blame, shame, and disdain on their families. But God created humankind with a diversity of abilities, skills, gifts, and talents. Some of our siblings who live with a disability remind us that they have strong bodies and full lives, and that those living with a disability are no less gifted, talented, or human than another.

With that said, in today's reading it's hard to tell if the man was living with a disability. The author said in verse 46 that that he was "a blind beggar" "sitting by the roadside. But, when he came to Jesus, he threw off his coat, sprang up, and went to Jesus. So, maybe he could partially see? But there's something more to this. When we explore the original Greek language, the word here for "blind," *Tu-ph-los*, has two meanings. It can mean being naturally blind, as in unable to see, but it can also mean being spiritually blind. So, this is tricky.

Taken together, it seems that the author is emphasizing that his blindness is a disposition more than a condition, and perhaps it's solely a disposition. That is, "blindness" in this story mainly describes how the man was treated and acted, and maybe has nothing to do with a disability.

Does that make sense?

If we look at this moment of healing as a change in temperament, outlook, or inclination, then we experience this text in a new manner. Right? Because instead of the text being about God needing to rid the world of people living with disabilities, the text becomes about our natural tendency to lose out on the fullness of life. This general disposition is what St. Augustine and Martin Luther called being “curved or turned inward on oneself.” In other words, it’s the human tendency is to take all the best gifts of God and curve them in on ourselves. We take more than what God has given for us to use. We become blinded by our own beliefs and ideologies. Our ego gets in the way of understanding the person with whom we disagree. We believe the lie that we are self-made and fully independent. Our pride gets in the way of seeing the other. Our ego prevents us from experiencing wholeness with all of creation. Our singleness in pursuing our own fleeting happiness puts up blinders; our desire to seek fame, money, and status clouds our vision; and our incessant pursuit of comfort leaves us blind, alone, and crying out. We cry out for depth in connections. We cry out for the vision to see beyond our own bubble. We cry out to be made whole.

But, then again, maybe today’s story isn’t about the blind man. What if it’s a story about the crowd. What if it’s about the ways that the dominate majority can call

the minority “blind?” What if this story is meant to show us how quickly the masses can push another to the side and silence their just lament? In that case, maybe the reading is about how Jesus puts the majority to work in caring for the minority. I mean, notice how in verse 48 Jesus heard the man, then “stood still,” and told the crowd to get to work. That was not a toss away detail. Jesus told the people to elevate the voice of the silenced. Jesus illuminated the call of the one seeking to find wholeness. Jesus took the one who was excluded from the crowd and restored him to the community. Maybe this story is less about the man who happened to be blind, and more about how differences can lead the masses toward an “us and them” mentality. How it can lead those in power to silence the margins. After all, isn’t that our human tendency? Don’t we all too easily make “in groups” and “out groups?” But in our quickness to label “friend” and “foe,” it is we who become blinded to the gifts and perspective that bring a fullness to our understanding.

But, the thing is, I’m not sure that this reading is about the man or about the crowd. In fact, it’s probably more about Jesus and God’s vision. You see, when Jesus said that the man was made “well,” that was an English understatement. In Greek, the word translated as “well” comes from the root, *sozo*, also means healed, saved, and to be whole. In that moment, Jesus restored the man to the community *and*

the community to the man. Wholeness was Jesus' gift. Then, the final sentence also tells us that the man followed Jesus along the way. That is, that the man continued to do the work of Jesus in embracing a fullness of understanding. The man came to follow the way of Christ in rejecting violence and pride. The man began to see that acts of service and love are the primary language of our God. The man was restored in the community, and the community was made whole with the man.

So, perhaps this is where we are best left with today's reading. We're left wondering how we might be blinded like the man by our own selfishness and ego. We're left to examine how we've perpetuated systems and used our power to silence and shun the other. But, we're not left there alone. Rather, we are invited by our God to live into a reality where wholeness can only come from the fullness of the community. A vision for a presence that invites you and me to join with others in doing God's work and encourages us share our gifts. That is God's invitation into wholeness. For there, is a healing that only God's grace can give. Amen.