

# BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

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*JOHN 9:1-41; EPHESIANS 5:8-14*  
*LETHBRIDGE MENNONITE CHURCH*  
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Earlier this week I was talking with Kathrina about how the kids were planning on structuring this morning's worship service.

They wanted lots of singing, they said. And less talking 😊.

Ironically, perhaps, our gospel story—the one that the kids just acted out for us—has a *lot* of talking in it.

The story begins with Jesus healing a man born blind and then the rest of the passage is taken up by people—mostly very *religious* people—arguing about it means or doesn't mean.

We have a man who was blind and now, because of Jesus, finds himself able to see! And we have everyone around him talking, talking, talking...

I'm not going to do a lot of talking this morning. I'm not going to spend a lot of time explaining the text.

I don't often do this, but if you'd like to read a sermon that I preached on this text three years ago where I *do* spend more time in the text itself, you can visit my blog and click on the "Sermons" tab and then a sermon called "He Opened My Eyes."

What I want to do is to focus on the statement Jesus ends with.

For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind (9:39).

Jesus says weird things sometimes. Sometimes our familiarity with the stories of the gospels blind us to just how strange some of the things Jesus' pronouncements really are.

Taken at face value, this is a very strange statement. Jesus has just given a blind man his sight, and now here he is seeming to advocate blindness.

Of course he's not talking about physical blindness—we know this—but still. It's a strange thing to hear.

The question Jesus is trying to get the Pharisees to see, the question that he places before all of us is a simple one: Who sees and who doesn't?

But simple questions are sometimes easy to miss, easy to ignore in favour of other questions.

In all the preceding verses in this passage we see that the disciples and the Pharisees (and probably everyone else) was concerned about the question of sin.

- Who's a sinner and who isn't?
- Whose sin caused this man to be born blind (the disciples' question)?
- How could a "sinner" heal anyone (the Pharisees' question)?

Those around the blind man seemed more concerned with how this event fits into their existing assumptions about who God is and how God works and how to predict cause and effect in a world where bad things happen.

This is particularly true of the Pharisees.

The disciples kind of bumble along with Jesus gradually having their categories reshaped by what he says and does.

But the Pharisees are less willing to do so (there are exceptions, like Nicodemus). Their man concern is that their theological categories be preserved: in/out; clean/unclean; holy/profane; sinner/righteous.

They know how God works, why God works, and when God works. They are the gatekeepers, the teachers of the Law, the managers of God.

This healing on the Sabbath—when no work could be done—is a very inconvenient and public disruption of their system and they fight against it in ridiculous and often comical ways in this text.

Jesus is less concerned with all of these categories and systems. He sees people and he wants people to see him.

Jesus wants us to see that our vision is off, that we don't see the way we ought to.

Why not? Well, the most obvious answer is because we are afraid.

We see this with the Pharisees throughout this passage. Fear is behind their entire reaction to this miraculous healing:

- Fear that they didn't understand God
- Fear that their worldview wasn't as stable as they thought
- Fear that God was more generous than they were
- Fear that God could not be controlled or managed by their systems
- Fear that they were not, in fact, the ones who understood God best; fear that a blind man by the side of the road knew and experienced more of God than they did, with all their learning and sophistication

Behind the desire to control, there is almost always the presence of fear.

The blind man, in contrast, is not afraid.

He's not afraid of those who doubt among his neighbours and community. He's not afraid of the Pharisees who have great power over him, who eventually throw him out of the synagogue.

He's not afraid to worship this man that others see as a suspicious sinner.

He doesn't understand how it all works, he doesn't really get all the distinctions the Pharisees are trying to make and maintain, he doesn't even know who it is who healed him until the end of the story.

But he does know that he can see. And he bears witness to this with great joy!

*All I know is that I was blind but now I see.*

He "sees" truly, in both the physical and metaphorical senses of the word.

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So where are we in this story?

Are we the righteous religious elite, convinced that we are the ones who know and understand God, that we know where to look to see God?

Are we the managers of God, convinced that we know how things work, determined to snuff out any signs of illegitimate life that operates outside the boundaries we've agreed upon?

Or are we blind enough to see the one who opens our eyes? Are we humble enough to say, "there's a lot that I don't know or understand, but I do know that this Jesus has opened my eyes to see who God is and what his kingdom looks like?"

This is *the* question.

It is the question that faces the church, at every level—globally, nationally, provincially, and locally.

Are we afraid to bear witness to Jesus in a cultural context of pluralism that abhors exclusive language? Do we worry that we will be seen as naïve if we say, like the blind man, *all I know is that this Jesus has opened my eyes.*

Do we, like the Pharisees, cling to assumptions and structures and institutions that have served us well, that provide us with a kind of security, but which may have outlived their usefulness?

These are hard questions that we are wrestling with in the Mennonite Church. They were obvious at our MCA meetings last weekend.

And I think they are questions that we will face here at LMC as well. Questions about how faith will be formed in our children and young adults, about how all of our committees and discernment groups will be populated in a context where people are increasingly unable or unwilling to commit to these.

Are we open to a move of God's spirit that may be asking us to relinquish influence and control and power in a context where few people look to the church for these things anymore and to adopt the postures of humility, patience, service, and joyful witness?

And of course these questions are personal ones, too. They apply not just to the church but to our individual faith as well.

Is our faith more or less a settled matter, where we think we have all the answers we need, where we're no longer open to being surprised by the healing work of God?

Do we actually hunger for an encounter with God that transforms and enlivens us? Do we hunger and thirst for righteousness, for Christ and his kingdom? Or is our faith little more than an inherited social obligation or insurance policy?

It is fundamentally about the posture we adopt as we move through life, as we live and worship together as churches, as we seek to proclaim, live into, and be surprised by Christ's kingdom.

Over and over, throughout the gospels, we see that it is those on the bottom... those who are humble and hungry for mercy, those who are young—the children—those who are of ill repute and shamefully fall at Jesus' feet (like the woman with her perfume)... these are the ones who see clearly.

The ones who stubbornly cling to what they think they know about God, those who are desperate to keep God inside of the religious boxes that they create and maintain while refusing to be open to the light and life that Christ seeks to bring, are the ones who do not.

This, I think, is what Jesus means when he says, "I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

And, in an ironic twist, when we are able to recognize our blindness, we become children of light.

Ephesians 5:8 says, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."

We are just over halfway through our Lenten journey toward the cross and empty tomb.

My prayer is that God would use this season to help us to recognize our blindness and in so doing, to be children of light.

Amen.

