

John 9:1-41

Over the course of the last three Sundays we have learned about 4 different “signs” performed by Jesus. First, we had the Samaritan woman at the well. The sign for her probably doesn’t seem very dramatic at all, at least to us. Jesus apparently told her her entire life story, though all that is mentioned is the part about how many husbands she had had. Last week we read about two different people who were healed. First was the young son of a royal official. In this case, Jesus was not even physically present with the boy and was instead at least 20 miles away. Then we had the man who had been ill for 38 years who Jesus simply told to pick up his mat and walk. Finally, today we have the blind man who was received his sight.

Before we get to that healing though, lets consider what Jesus’ disciples asked him about the blind man. The disciples believed that the blindness must be due to sin on someone’s part, either the man or his parents. They were not the only ones though. The Pharisees also shared this belief, which they showed when they said that the blind man was born entirely in sins. Lest we think that we are at least more educated than that, how many can honestly say that when they encounter someone with an obvious physical deformity, or are in a wheelchair, that we treat them the same as everyone else? I had a friend who used a wheelchair. One time we were in a crowded casino in Las Vegas and people were not even trying to make space as he moved along. I asked him about it and he said that it was common and that he usually felt like he was invisible the people around him.

The blind man in today’s lesson might have felt invisible too. Just one more beggar on the street. Maybe we should just walk on by before he asks for anything. But Jesus doesn’t even wait to be asked. He makes a bit of mud, smears it on the man’s eyes, and tells him to go wash it off. The man can now see, and will live happily ever after. Well, not quite. Because, as Jesus said, God’s works are to be revealed in him.

First, some of the man's neighbors have doubts that it is the same person, even though they have probably known him, and his family, for his entire life. The Pharisees did not even believe the man had actually been born blind until his parents confirmed it. When they were no longer able to refute the healing, the Pharisees instead claimed that Jesus must be a sinner because the healing was done on the sabbath. Finally, when the newly healed man dared to claim that Jesus was sent from God, the Pharisees drove him out of the synagogue. They could not accept any challenge to their authority.

Compare this response to what happened with the Samaritan woman at the well. Many of the Samaritans believed in Jesus simply based on this woman's word. They did not even need the physical evidence of a blind man now being able to see. Others in the city later came to believe after hearing Jesus for themselves.

Why do we sometimes trust with no evidence at all, while at other times denying the truth no matter how much evidence we receive? Often, this depends on a person's or group's existing beliefs and social status. The Samaritans were looked down on by the Jews, and perhaps that is one reason they were ready to believe in Jesus. The Pharisees on the other hand enjoyed a relatively elite status, but they also recognized that their position was dependent on keeping the population under control. They also had a long tradition for how they observed God's commandments. In some cases, they had lost the underlying meaning behind the law and replaced it with ritual and restriction.

What does it take to change someone else's mind? What does it take to change our own mind? How much evidence does it take? What truths are we blind to, simply because we don't like what we could learn? These questions might be just as important today as they were in Jesus' time.

I don't really have a good answer to these questions, but there are some strategies that most anyone can apply. First, be curious. Pick an issue that concerns you and learn more about it. Talk to someone a couple of generations away from yourself, such as a grandchild or grandparent. Do this out of love, rather than to change someone else's

mind or out of judgment. Second, don't get all your news from one place, or a bunch of similar places. If you find that you "agree" with all the news you are getting, you are almost certainly only getting one side of the story. Finally, don't be afraid. We probably make more wrong choices out of fear than any other single reason. Don't be afraid to change your mind, or to admit that we were wrong. Jesus will be right there with us no matter what.

We have these signs so that we can know who Jesus is. He can see into our inmost being. He listens to prayers, and is not limited by distance, time, or man's limited interpretations of God's laws. He provides healing and wholeness. And he opens eyes to truth, provides light in our darkness, and will not abandon us even if all of our former friends and neighbors do.

May Christ's light shine in and through us and show us the way to truth and love.

Amen