

Jordan Station United Church

Lent 4 – Week 2 of Social Distancing

Rev. Anita Spiller

Sermon: "Surely we are not blind, are we?"

(John 9:1-41)

(Bold text indicates words spoken by Jesus)

Karolin Lewis (a theological icon of mine) said "that preaching on John 9:1-41 reminds her of the children's book *A Fish Out of Water*, not because of the moral lesson of closely listening to the instructions of persons who know much more than you do, but because Otto, the fish, was indeed a fish out of water. Because Otto is fed too much (the feeding instructions were not followed--"When you feed a fish, never feed him a lot. So much and no more! Never more than a spot, or something may happen! You never know what.") he grows and grows and outgrows every bowl, pot, and container to which he is moved. He even becomes too big for the public swimming pool!"

I don't know about you? But I am indeed a fish out of water right now. My fish bowl is our beloved church building and my daily activities revolve around swimming with all of you. My swimming had previously been lighting candles in community pray, visiting folks at home and in hospitals, journeying with families whose loved ones have died, practicing music & being present and available to our children and youth. All of this rooted in the Word of God, the sacraments and lots of hugs. Well my pool has been closed temporarily and I am having to find new ways of reaching the people of God and helping those on the margins. New ways to express the love and safety that a hug can provide.

I am a fish out of water...flopping around trying to find my way. I suspect you are having the exact same experience.

In today's Gospel lesson from John, the same can be said about it! It too is like a fish out of water, trying to take on new life. Here we have John's account of the healing of the man born blind which certainly is a sign, for it points to Jesus the Healer and Light of the World. At the same time, it declares that physical blindness can be healed, but spiritual blindness cannot. So today, we ask the question . . . "surely we are not blind, are we?"

Here we have a man who has been blind from birth. This is mentioned as a part of the story and is important because it speaks to a condition from birth and not a state of being blinded by an accident or disease. This is a young man, which causes Jesus' disciples to wonder aloud the cause. "Why, Lord?" They were curious. They assumed that his blindness was a result of sin, but since he was young, they wondered if it might have been his parents' sin that caused it, not his. So, they asked their rabbi -- Jesus.

² 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'

³ **'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,'** said Jesus, **'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.'**" (9:2-3)

Jesus' answer makes it clear that in this case his affliction wasn't because of someone's sin, but because God had a larger purpose in it, that **"the work of God might be displayed in his life"** (9:3).

Seeing the blind man, Jesus speaks of light and darkness -- perhaps with the idea that the eyes are the portals of light to the body (Matthew 6:22-23).

⁴ **"As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."** (9:4-5)

Wow did this passage stand out for me in this time when everything is shutting down and words goes into isolation and darkness. Perhaps the night has arrived because very few can work. It can be easy at this time to fall into darkness...to turn away from each other and light and give into depression. But as Jesus reminds us so beautifully, **"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. (9:5)** As long as we have Jesus in our hearts and in our lives, we will ALWAYS have light. No matter what is happening in the world. I believe that Jesus is saying simply that we must do God's works while we have the opportunity, because the time will come when we won't be able to do them any longer. It is a word to motivate those of us who feel too busy (or too selfish) to fulfill our calling. Don't put off for later what you can do today! And don't let the things you can not do stop you from doing the things you can do! (A quote from Goodlife fitness.)

Now John describes the healing miracle in a few short words.

⁶ Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ **'Go,'** he told him, **'wash in the Pool of Siloam'** (this word means Sent). So, the man went and washed, and came home seeing." (9:6-7)

Where the man went was to a mikveh. My Jewish friend Lisa was just telling me recently about the mikvehs. They are a bath or pool used for ritual immersion for ceremonial cleansing. How fitting that Jesus should use his own saliva mixed with mud to heal the man? How fitting also that it would take an action from the man to go to the healing bath for his sight to be restored? This I believe is a critical reminder that while Jesus can lead the way, we have to take action. We have to put our faith into action. We minister as Jesus leads us. A chance for us to exercise our own faith in bringing about our own healing.

The next part of the story tells us that the man didn't return to Jesus but went home to his neighbourhood.

⁸ His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, 'Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?' ⁹ Some claimed that he was. Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.'

But he himself insisted, 'I am the man.'

¹⁰ 'How then were your eyes opened?' they demanded.

¹¹ He replied, 'The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So, I went and washed, and then I could see.'

¹² 'Where is this man?' they asked him.

'I don't know,' he said." (9:8-12)

The miracle was so great that some of his neighbors didn't believe he could be the same man they saw begging. But he told them, "I am the man," and kept telling the story about how it happened. To make a long story short basically what happens now is that the Pharisees, the Jews and his neighbours don't believe him. They question whether or not he was ever blind and they drive him out of his home. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, **"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"** (9:35) He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, **"You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he."** (9:37) He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, **"I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."** (9:39) Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, **"If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."** (9:41) It is Jesus of course who interprets the story for us. He clarifies what it means to see and hear and believe. The blind man represents one of Jesus flock. One of the many sheep that he has and continues to heal. As a result, hearing and seeing are much more than ways by which one recognizes or believes in Jesus. They are, in fact, expressions of a relationship with Jesus and a relationship with Jesus means also a relationship with God.

So, the question for us today is whether or not we are blind? And if we are blind, what are we blind to? Who are the people and the situations that we are blind to? Especially in this time when people are hoarding food and hygiene products where do we stand on honouring Jesus' call to love and serve others? What actions are you taking to ensure that your neighbours cupboards are full? That the homeless who are unable to isolate because they don't have a home have food, shelter and clothing. It is a time when we all must wrestle with what each of us can do to serve the least among us.

What are your ideas? If you are watching this service live right now, add your ideas in the comments. How can we serve God right now? Amen