

There But For The Grace of God Go I

John 9:1-41

How many blind people are there in this story?

Well, let's count them . . .

One. There's the man who was physically blind from birth whom Jesus sees. It must have been pretty obvious that he was blind because the disciples comment on his condition. Perhaps he was well-known in that community?

Two. Speaking of the disciples. Aren't they blind too? Blinded by the man's blindness. Blinded by their prejudice. Blinded by their sighted superiority. "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Three. Then there's the man's neighbours. They're blinded by their scepticism. Blinded by their knowledge. Blinded by their experience. For them, it's just not possible this is the same man who used to be blind. You can't just be blind one minute and be able to see the next. Which means they're blind to God at work in this man's life . . . and in their world!

Four. The Pharisees. Ah, so much blindness here! They're blinded by their theology. Blinded by their righteousness. Blinded by their certainty. Blinded by their entitlement. Blinded by their piousness. Blinded by their ability to see. They know best and nothing will ever be able to sway them. They are so sure of themselves that they can't see what's happening in front of them.

Five. The man's parents. They're blinded by fear. Fear of what might happen to them if they said the wrong thing.

There's so much blindness in this story. In fact, it seems that *everyone* in the story is blind in some way . . . except Jesus. Which suggests to me that this is *our* story too! Not just a long, rambling, narrative from some ancient book, but our story too. And, I hope that doesn't come as a surprise to you, that you might exclaim: "What? Are we blind too?"

Are we blind too? Well, let's count the ways . . .

One. Physically blind. I don't think any of us here is totally blind, but most of us know what it's like to have some sort of physical vision impairment. Our eyes age and change and need corrective measures. I've worn contact lenses since I was a teenager. Without them you would all be just a blur.

Two. Blinded by prejudice. What's yours? How often do we let the generalisations . . . the stereotypes . . . inform our judgments rather than the relationship with an individual person? How often do we make a judgment of someone based on the colour of their skin, or their looks, or the way they talk, or their

disability? How often does our language betray us, when we say, “Oh, they’re a diabetic” . . . or, “They’re a paraplegic” . . . as if that’s an identity? How often do we find specks in our neighbour’s eye and miss the log in our own eye?

Three. Blinded by scepticism. So blinded by our own experience that we’re unable to walk in someone else’s shoes. Or validate someone else’s experience. That hasn’t happened to you, has it? And, like most things, a certain degree of scepticism can be healthy, but our scepticism can also shut us off from the wonderful things that happen around us and how God is at work in our world.

Four. Blinded by our theology. Blinded by our certainty. Blinded by our rightness. It’s why we’re Lutherans, isn’t it? Because we’re right! Pharisaical blindness is a condition every church, every denomination, every congregation wrestles with all the time. Notice how even the term ‘Pharisee’ has become a stereotype . . . a stereotype none of us want to be associated with, but ask around outside the church and it’s how many see us . . . just a bunch of hypocrites!

Five. Blinded by fear. How often do we let our fears control what we do and how we act? How often do we let our fears dictate our confession? How often do we deflect and dodge talking about Jesus?

Are we blind too? Yes, this is our story! And, like this story in John’s Gospel, our story can a long one, and it can be quite complex and convoluted. But, I have a very simple takeaway from this story of blindness. That takeaway is . . . humility.

Humility.

As we go into the world . . . as we live in the world, let us live, first and foremost, with humility. We don’t see perfectly. We don’t know everything. We don’t have all the answers . . . or even all the questions! Like so many others we are blind! In fact, we were *born* blind! Not physically blind, but spiritually blind. So, before we impose our great visions on others . . . before we insist that we know what’s right . . . before we dazzle them with our brilliance and set them on the right path . . . before we make judgments on others, or put them in a box, let’s take a breath and think about *our* story.

You see, our story, doesn’t even start with *us* seeing . . . it starts with us *being* seen. Jesus sees us. That’s where it starts. Jesus sees our hearts. Jesus sees us in our blindness. Jesus comes to us in our blindness. And, like the man born blind in the story we don’t first *see* Jesus, but we *hear* Jesus. That too is how it starts. We hear Jesus. We hear Jesus say to us: “You are mine. Even in your blindness, you are mine. Be washed so I may open your eyes to the world as I see it”. Our story starts with Jesus opening our eyes . . . not our physical eyes, but our spiritual eyes. And, the first thing we see when our eyes are opened by Jesus is . . . no, it’s not the stereotypes or the specks in others’ eyes . . . what we notice is our blindness. What we notice is that we don’t have it all together. What we notice is that we aren’t the experts on life. What we notice is that we’re not sure on where the road ahead leads. What we notice is that we have a story . . . maybe that’s all we have . . . a story. A story that begins, “I was blind, but now I see”. It’s a story that we can share . . . when invited . . . when someone asks. And, we don’t have to have all the details down pat . . . we don’t have to understand, or be able to explain everything . . . the story is evolving and developing because the one who opened our eyes keeps seeking us out . . . he keeps coming to us . . . he keeps speaking to us and reminding us who he is . . . and who we are. We are people who are still

impacted by blindness, so we approach the world with humility . . . and we understand that even our eyes can blind us to reality.

Later when we meet Jesus at Lord's Supper what we see is a scrap of wafer and a sip of wine. I our sceptic minds may say, "That's all there is", but what we *hear* is Jesus' words: "This is my body given for you, this is my blood shed for you . . . for the forgiveness of your sins". Through those words Jesus opens our eyes to his presence. Through those words Jesus opens our eyes to his life . . . a life that he now shares with us and calls us to share with others . . . with humility.

So, we go from here back into the world . . . a world full of sceptics . . . a world full of doubters . . . a world full of fear . . . a world full of blindness. But, that need not phase us, because we go knowing our own doubts, our own fears, our own blindness . . . we are not better than anyone else . . . we don't have to change anyone, or convert anyone to our way . . . we don't have all the answers . . . but we do have a story . . . it's a story that starts, "I was blind, but now I see".

Amen.

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