

3-26-17 BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

“JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING: EYES WIDE OPEN”

Pastor Becky Smithey

Scripture: John 9:1-41 (CEV)

This is the third week that we will be talking about the metaphors of "light and darkness" in the Gospel of John. Remember that, in John Chapter 1 we are told that "the light (Who is Jesus) shines in the darkness and the darkness doesn't extinguish it." Then it says that the world came into being through Jesus--"the light"-- but "the world didn't recognize the light."

"The light came to his own people, but his own people didn't welcome him. But to those who did welcome him, to those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God's children, born not from blood or from human desire or passion, but born from God."

Then we went on to look at John Chapter 3 where Nicodemus, a Jewish leader came to Jesus under the cover of night to ask Jesus some questions. And Jesus told Him that in order to enter the Kingdom of God he would have to be "born again," or "born anew," or "born from above." For "Whatever is born of flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit." But Nicodemus didn't understand Jesus' teaching. And he ended his conversation with Jesus by asking: "How are these things possible?" And then he faded back into the shadows of the night. And night, in the Gospel of John, symbolizes separation from God.

It's not a mistake that John Chapter 4 brings us the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. The contrast between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman is striking, and we are meant to notice this contrast.

Think about it. Nicodemus is a Jewish Religious Ruler who comes to Jesus at night, and then after a conversation with "The Light"--Who is Jesus--fades back into the night in fear, misunderstanding and unbelief. The Samaritan Woman meets Jesus at noon, at the height of day--in the bright sunlight.

And whereas Nicodemus is unable to move beyond the confines of his religious system, the Samaritan woman moves outside of her religious expectations to engage Jesus in a theological debate.

And, whereas, John 3:17 indicates that Nicodemus is unable to believe that Jesus is God's Son, the Samaritan woman actually listens and hears Jesus say that He is God-Made-Flesh when He refers to Himself by the name of God in John 4:26 by saying, "I Am."

And while Nicodemus' last questioning words to Jesus expose his disbelief, the last words of the Samaritan Woman lead her to witness to her whole town!!! And through her witnessing she comes to believe.

Putting her faith into action, in this case, talking about it or talking it out--sharing it helps her to see the TRUTH which sets her free. Some of us are verbal learners. I know I am.

When I was an 18 year old college freshman I would stay up till all hours of the night talking to this friend I knew. And what I was talking about was my faith, Jesus, heaven, hell and the meaning of life. And she would sit and listen as I went on and on and on. And the words which came out of my mouth...well...they were new to me. They were things that I had learned throughout my life, through my church, my parents and Christian friends--which only came together and made sense as I "verbalized them." And by verbalizing these "Truths" I came to realize what I really believed. It was after that that I truly recommitted my life to Jesus.

Not everyone is the same, though. Some people learn by "doing." For instance, many people come to the knowledge of Christ as Savior and Lord as they feed the poor in His name, cloth the naked in His name, and do all sorts of other loving acts in His name. Maybe that is how you learned that you believe in Jesus as Christ and Lord.

Other people are "visual learners." Perhaps they came to know Jesus by watching other Christians, either being transformed themselves as they came to Christ...or watching other Christians love in Jesus' name.

Many of us probably learn and come to know Christ by the combination of any number of learning methods...reading, listening...

In any event, the Woman at the Well and the Man Born Blind seem to have come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord through a "kind of" similar process. What I mean is, it didn't necessarily happen all at once. It came through action, words, conversation, thought, problem solving, and determination--gutsy determination!!! And in both instances, Jesus is the One Who found them, not the other way around. Jesus instigated the relationship.

And that is how it works for all of us. It's not that we loved God, or were looking for God, but God came looking for us!!! God tapped on our shoulder, God called our name. God revealed God-self to us. For it is by grace we are saved!!! And we love, only because God first loved us.

So, here we are in John Chapter 9, and "As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who was blind from birth." Notice that Jesus is the One Who notices the man.

Do we notice folks as well? Do we see the blind, the downtrodden, the lost, the hurt? It's very easy--the easiest thing--NOT to see them, to pretend they aren't there. Have you ever done that? I have.

In any event, the disciples ask Jesus a very strange question: "Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?" What a horrible world-view!!! Can you imagine how that must have made the blind man feel about himself? Talk about a blow to your self-esteem. "I was born blind because I sinned, or deserved it, or my parents sinned." But this is what the Pharisees seemed to believe and teach. And so this guy wasn't just looked down upon because he was blind, but also because he must have brought this curse upon himself!!! Jesus will have none of this. Jesus answered them, "This didn't happen because of his sin or his parent's sin."

Then, in verse 5, without the man asking for it, and Jesus again declaring that He is "the light of the world," Jesus heals the guy. He went and washed in the pool of Saloam, and when he came back, "he could see."

And then what happens? His journey begins, does it not? The first people he comes up against are his neighbors. These are the folks who used to pass him by every day as he begged. After-all, in those days, if you were blind you couldn't work. The only way you could subsist or make a living on your own was through begging. So, some asked, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is." These are the believers. Others said, "No it's somebody who looks like him." These are the folks who are unwilling to believe and thus make excuses. "Nah, that's just his body-double!!!"

But the man doesn't pull any punches, "Yes, it's me," he declares. And when he tells them about Jesus and what He did, he neither knows Who Jesus is nor where Jesus is.

So the neighbors drag the guy off to the wonderful Pharisees. And since Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath--which was against biblical Law--all the Pharisees could see was the sin in it all!!! "This man isn't from God, because he breaks the Sabbath law," they said.

[Read John 9:13-34 CEV]

Then, they questioned the man who had been born blind, "What do you have to say about him, since he healed your eyes?" And he comes up with the best answer he can...his faith is growing, his "spiritual sight" is increasing with every inquiry and conversation: "He's a prophet," replied the man.

The religious leaders don't believe the man. They don't believe he had even been blind. Or, they don't want to believe it. Because if they do believe it, it will mess up all their previously held fundamental notions about God and their whole house of cards may come falling down!!!

So they call for the man's parents. And the man's parents don't stand up for their son. Instead, they act on their fear. They knew that "whoever confessed Jesus to be the Christ would be expelled from the synagogue."

So they go back to the man. "Give glory to God," they demand. "We know this man is a sinner." It's interesting because the term: "Give glory to God" meant, "tell the truth." So the man answers with the truth: "Here's what I do know; I was blind and now I see."

But this isn't enough. They keep badgering him and they keep insulting him. And the man, unlike his parents, unlike those neighbors of his who claimed that he was "some sort of body double"--doesn't act out of fear; he acts out of conviction instead!!! And therefore, he does, indeed, give God the glory!!! "This is incredible," he says to them, "You don't know where he's from, yet he healed my eyes! If this man wasn't from God, he couldn't do this."

But they decide, to, once and for all BE BLIND themselves!!! They will not listen to the truth--so they throw him out!!! And with some last (choice words) they tell the man born blind: "You were born completely in sin!" They reject the whole thing: the healing, Jesus, the truth, everything!!!

And that brings us back to the beginning for a moment; it brings us back to the disciple's initial question. Because, you see, in the Gospel of John "sin" is not some kind of "moral category" like breaking the Sabbath or something like that. Sin is not defined by what a person does, but almost exclusively by a person's relationship to Jesus...by whether a person is willing to "come to the light, walk in the light," and believe in Jesus.

God's One and only Son, whom God sent into the world to save the world, "so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. Whoever believes in him isn't judged; whoever doesn't believe in him is already judged, because they don't believe..." And here is "the basis for judgment: the light came into the world, and people loved darkness more than light..." ...but, "Whoever does the truth comes to the light..."

The blind man did the truth. He came to the light. The Pharisees ran from the light. The man's neighbors ran from the light. The man's parents ran from the light!!! They proved that "they loved darkness more than the light..."

[Read John 9:35-41 CEV]

So Jesus says to the Pharisees who know, in their heart of hearts, that this man's healing is real and that Jesus did it...Jesus says to them, "I have come into the world to exercise judgment so that those who don't see can see and those who see will become blind."

And to this the Pharisees ask: "Surely we aren't blind are we?" To which Jesus replies, probably very sadly: "If you were blind, you wouldn't have any sin, but now that you say 'We see,' your sin remains."

Their sin remains because they do not--or will not believe that Jesus is God's Son. The man-born-blind on the other hand, has his salvation moment. His faith has been growing with every test and every inquiry. His faith has been growing the longer he has been walking in the light of the truth.

So, finding him, Jesus said, "Do you believe in the Human One?" And, "He answered, 'Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him.'" Jesus said, "You have seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you." The man said, "Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Jesus." And in that moment the man's life is changed forever. His spiritual eyes are completely open and he sees Jesus for Who Jesus really is!!! He believes!!! He is saved. He is born again. He is a child of God. He is a new creation. "For that which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of spirit is spirit." You must be born again!!!

Sin only occurs in response to Jesus. How have you responded to Jesus? To diss Him, to "not believe," not be changed, not worship in spirit and in truth, not walk in the light--is to be condemned because "your sin remains." To come to the light. To believe that God so loved the world that God sent God's One and Only Son into the world to save the world is to be saved. There is no greater decision in all the world.

Have you made the decision to believe that Jesus is Who Jesus says He is? To reject the love of God in Jesus Christ is to pass from the possibility of salvation to judgment.

In John Chapter 9, almost everybody fails the man born blind. Perhaps you feel that everybody has failed you as well. The parents of the man born blind put their own safety before their son's welfare. His community fails him. The religious authorities fail him.

But the man sticks to his guns; he tells the truth even in the face of threats and abandonment. "I was blind, but now I see." Again and again and again, the man witnesses to the saving grace he has experienced in Jesus Christ.

And as it turns out, Jesus is the Only One the man can trust. It is Jesus Who stands with the man when everyone else has ditched him. And Jesus stands with us as well.

Sometimes when a light is really bright, we need to squint or shut our eyes. The brightness seems dangerous; the reflex is automatic. Metaphorically, in John Chapter 9, we see this human reaction unfold. Jesus shines bright, and the community, the Pharisees and the man's parents shut their eyes in self-defense.

But when the Light of the World is in our midst, we need NOT shut our eyes. The best thing to do is to open our eyes, wide. We will not be blinded by the Light. We will see Jesus and we will be saved. Praise God. Amen.

John 9:1-12 (God's Word)

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "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 works of God might be displayed in him. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the works 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." ⁶ After saying 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. 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 asked. 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.

L: The Word of God, for the People of God.

P: Thanks be to God.