

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 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.” 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.” 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.”

Where is our focus these days?

It’s good to stay informed about the pandemic that we are experiencing and the Center for Disease Control is still the most reliable source. Living, as we do, at the center of the outbreak in the U.S., we are among the first who have had to adjust to this new reality that includes temporarily changing how we “do church” together, among other things. There’s no question that this situation is at least disruptive for most of us and downright chaotic for others.

Even so, the question stands: “Where is our focus?”

Focusing on the coronavirus is not the same as staying informed. Focusing on the disease has led people to panic, hoarding toilet paper, diapers and medical facemasks so that people who really need them can’t get them. We are all uncertain about what the future holds, to one degree or another, but focusing only on the problem leads to anxiety and fear.

There is another option.

And John’s Gospel lays it out for us. “Rabbi,” the disciples ask, “who sinned?”

First, Jesus refocuses the question to make a universal plea about the need to move from spiritual darkness to light. Then he participates in God’s on-going, eternal moment of creation *beyond* space and time through which God brings light out of darkness.

In Genesis, YHWH creates “adama,” which is not a man’s name, but a description. The Hebrew word means “mud-creature,” “earthling.” YHWH breathes into the clay of the ground and the dust stirs to life and becomes human, a living soul. It’s a brilliant analogy of the onset of human evolution and consciousness.

Jesus, acting *within* history and in a particular place, merges his actions with the Creator’s in the sacramental gesture of making mud from his own saliva; an “outward and visible sign” of his “inner and spiritual grace.”

He anoints the eyes of the man born blind and sends him to wash in a pool called “Sent Forth.” It is only then that the man’s physical sight is opened. What’s more, he is also now able to see and respond to the Divine Source.

Where is *our* focus?

If we have eyes to see, the point for us in this moment, is to watch for the presence and the energy of God showing up in unexpected ways in the places to which you and I are sent.

John’s Jesus is not repairing a defective human. Jesus is not creating a better “mud-creature,” an “earthling” to replace the “adama” of God’s creating. Jesus is activating the latent, undeveloped spiritual sight of a human evolved from earthly matter. And like the earth, with God’s help, humans can produce a nearly unlimited bounty when they go out to do the work that God has given them to do with the seed of Christ-consciousness planted within them.

In John’s story, confusion reigns the once-blind man returns to those who knew him when he was blind: they don’t recognize him, they argue about his identity until he finally says: “I am.”

This man who now sees carries something more: growing within the very earthiness of his being, the Divine light begins to shine. He speaks the name God gave from the burning bush, even before he knows who Jesus is. Before he even knows who he himself has become, with the light of Christ now radiating from him, he speaks the name of the One with whom he is united; the One who created him to be in communion from the beginning.

Living as you and I do in historical time and in specific locations, can blind us to Kosmic movements of creation. This moment offers us an opportunity to set aside, at least briefly, questions about how this situation came to be; about who was at fault and what could have been done differently. Those conversations will be valuable in other settings and for other gatherings.

Our focus will wander. We will have better days and worse. Even so, we can choose where to turn our attention. God did not choose to make the man in John’s story blind any more than God chose to spread a contagious disease. In both cases, however, God is present in the suffering.

What if we heard the disciples asking, “Rabbi, who *alienated* this man, himself or his parents, that he was born blind?” The word “sin” carries a great deal of baggage, most of it limited to what should be done and what should not be done. As Jesus used the word, it referred to something more like estrangement from one’s God-given self, chosen separation from others, or isolation from the Divine presence within and beyond us.

Of course, none of this caused the man to be blind from birth. None of those separations cause viral diseases. *Life* here on this created earth is rife with suffering, unfairness and upheaval.

But not that only; never disorder *alone*.

There is also a Divine realm that is not other than, not separate from, not truly alienated from creation. During less turbulent times, spiritual maturity is the increasing awareness of the interpenetrating dance of the infinite Divine energy with finite created material; the timeless Eternal that animates temporal creation.

As we mature, we realize that only a few things really matter. All of those things involve love. And love, at some point, always involves suffering. It is the human condition.

Even so, what transcends and infuses all that is awesome beauty, resilient goodness and life-affirming joy.

Right now, in this time, in this place, life is challenging us to focus on renewed and courageous exploration into God, into our best selves, by choosing to stay connected to each other; by *deciding* to seek and to serve communion.

There is a shift beginning to swell if we will see it. Anyone may begin to sense a certain unity in the suffering; an increasing awareness that we are all affected by this crisis — every continent and country, every economic class, every religion and race.

Some will respond fearfully and blindly by acting as if they can save themselves. Self-centered contractions and catastrophic conversations alienate, isolate and separate, only adding to the suffering.

On the other hand, there are increasing numbers of people who recognize that the more hopeful response is to support each other, to act with patience and compassion for the well-being of those around us;

to act as though we trust that this crisis will pass, even as we practice prudent safe distancing; to act in the expectation that will see and experience God even as we temporarily suspend gathering in our sanctuaries.

The disruption of life as we have come to know it requires us to focus on what is most radically important so that we can strengthen our communion with each other and with God.

This is the task of all spiritual growth: to leave the comfortable rooms of the world as we know it; to agree to be sent forth like the man to whom John's Jesus gave sight with our own confusion, with our worries for friends and loved ones.

Our hearts and minds may be all over the place. And yet, if we consent, Christ will open our eyes and say with us, "I am."

Some of these experiences will be astonishing and some will be mundane. "But," as a friend of mine once wrote, "what is important here, when we speak of experience, is not its magnitude. What is important is that you become aware of something."

Appropriate to the season, Br. David goes on: "My favorite image for [the experience of communion with God] is the coming of spring. Sometimes spring comes suddenly, with a big bang. Yesterday it was still winter, but today spring is in the air. Spring came overnight. In other years it comes so gradually that you cannot even say when it came... You do not know how it came, but all that matters is that spring is here. And so all that matters is that you eventually become aware deep within you of ultimate communion. Whether it came with one sudden explosion or very, very slowly does not make any difference. Remember Awareness is what counts no matter how it seeps into your consciousness."

Where is our focus?

Jesus said to the man granted new vision, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." And he said, "Lord, I have faith."

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