

March 2, 2008

John 9:1-41
Lent IV

The Lenten Journey

Twenty two days gone, 18 days to go. That's where we are on our 2008 Lenten journey.

Those numbers are pretty close to the ratio of my life as well.

If I live to 80 or so, I have significantly more life gone than I have left.

We may resonate with the writer Dante:

“In the middle of this road we call life

I found myself in a dark wood

With no clear path through.”

The Lenten journey as metaphor for our life invites us to take time seriously and use our time wisely.

Our encouragement to practice a Lenten discipline that deepens our spiritual life is a reflection of the importance of this Lenten time, this Kairos time, this right now time. Times a ticking. In Lent we count the days.

Forty days, a microcosm of the days of our lives.

In our gospel story today we meet travelers on the journey. They are going in different directions – a blind man healed by Jesus and the religious leaders of the day.

Although in the Bible stories we tend to see ourselves as one or the other person in the story, today let's take the Jungian approach of imagining that we are all the people in the story; that all the people in the story live in us, the complex people that we are.

Let's talk about the inner battle within us – the blind beggar who is healed and the religious leaders. I see them going in radically different directions.

The Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, are knowledgeable practitioners of the tradition. Their religious beliefs make sense out of their lives; they are educated, learned, they have a high position in society; they are looked up to; their opinions carry authority.

A blind beggar, who apparently has been healed, is brought to them. They want to know more. They ask questions of the blind man – how did this happen?
Nothing wrong with getting the facts straight before you decide if the story is believable or not.
This seems to be the right way to approach things – so tell us what happened.....

Well the man replies – Jesus approached me, put mud on my eyes, told me to go and wash my eyes in the pool of Siloam and when I did I could see.

The Pharisees decide they need corroborating evidence. They have the mindset of a lawyer about them. They go to the man's parents and have questions for them. The parents speak of only what they know – yes this is our son, yes he was born blind, yes he can now see, but we have no idea how it happened- ask our son he can speak for himself.

The Pharisees then have round two of their interrogation of the man who has been healed, asking the same question, how did this happen?

Their scepticism; their guarding of the tradition, their difficulty in moving beyond what they already know, blinds them to the new thing God is doing. Can we see ourselves in these religious leaders?

I grew up in a family that valued the intellect, rational argumentation. The United Church of Canada had the truth, the evangelical/fundamentalist church had lost their way. I remember attending a worship service at the Pentecostal church to hear a singer. His words and message touched me, but he was Pentecostal. A dilemma. I had difficulty moving beyond my tradition, what I already knew, and this blinded me to God's spirit in this man's story and song.

If I only see what I already know how can I move forward on my Lenten journey? If I continue to interpret life through the same pair of glasses, through the template that I grew up with, what wonderful, life-changing experiences will I be blind to?

Our General Secretary of the United Church of Canada, Nora Saunders, addresses this question in her weekly message. She writes:

“Last Wednesday night I got home from the Lenten talk at the Church just before ten o’clock. The sky was dark but very clear. I glanced up and saw a wondrous sight.

Only a slice of light was visible at the side of the moon, with the rest of it hidden behind a shadowy brown disk.

It was something I had never seen before in just that way, but I knew what it was. I had read in the newspaper that an eclipse was to take place that night, and my mother had reminded me about it too.

Even though I knew it was coming, I almost forgot to look up. Even though I knew about it, I was surprised when I looked up and saw it. It was startlingly beautiful. Knowing to expect it was one thing, but actually seeing it was something different.

Even though I knew it was there, I almost forgot. If I hadn’t happened to look up, I would have missed it. If I hadn’t looked up at that particular time, within that period of two or three hours, I would have missed it and there would have been no visible sign that it had ever happened.

Faith requires us to look up. We can know that something is there, but we may not see unless we look.”

The man born blind stands before us healed and we continue to try and blow holes in his story, asking the same question – tell us how this happened? Entrenched and blind, fearful, our life journey fails to move us more deeply into God. Naming and battling this inner voice, this inner demon, may be for some of us our road this Lent.

Maybe it is fear that keeps us in the safe and familiar places. We may be adventurous when it comes to world travel –but being adventurous in our own inner journey, in letting go of old truths for new learnings – this can be much more of a challenge.

The Pharisees in our story today had the truth of Moses. It was tried and true, familiar.

The truth of Jesus just made things more complicated than they needed to be.

Let’s not bother going there. If we can discredit the source, the blind man’s story of being healed, then we don’t have to deal with Jesus.

Frequently the religious people get stuck. We fail to see.

Our Lenten journey may take us to this place.

“In the middle of this road we call our life
I found myself in a dark wood
With no clear way through.”

The religious in our story may have a shrinking faith – what about the blind beggar?

He follows Jesus’ commands – going and washing in the pool of Siloam. He tells what has happened to him in response to his neighbours questions. He tells his story again to the Pharisees and when they ask him who he thinks Jesus is he says “a prophet”.

When the Pharisees ask him a second time what happened he challenges them, teaching the teachers. He says “how can you say this man is not from God when he has given me my sight?”

And when the man encounters Jesus again he responds to Jesus’ self-revelation with a strong confession of faith – “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.”

From the recognition of Jesus as a prophet to the confession – “Lord, I believe” we see a deepening faith in the man who was blind. The events of his life have led him to believe that Jesus is Lord and is worthy of worship. His journey of faith is a deepening relationship with Christ.

Not only is he given his sight, but he finds his voice. He tells his story to his neighbours, some who question and doubt what he says. He tells his story, he speaks out of his truth to the Pharisees. He continues to find his own voice and speak out of his own experiences.

And he interprets the events of his life – this happened to me and this is what I believe it means. There is a person who has changed my life – I will worship him and follow him. At first I believed he was a prophet, now I believe he is the Lord.

The Pharisees go to his parents, maybe they can speak for the man – but it is not their story to tell. The parents know it is their son who was born blind and now sees, but the person who tells the story is the one whose story it is. We all have our own story to tell and to live out of. We find our voice and tell our story, a story that our parents cannot tell.

“This one thing I know, that Jesus took mud and put it on my eyes and told me to wash in the pool of Siloam. I washed and now I see.”

This is my story, this is what I know. And I have come to believe that this man who gave me sight is the Lord, the Son of God.

The man knew he was blind, his eyes were opened, and he was able to see Jesus and his life in a new way.

On our Lenten journey we have 18 more days to recognize that there are things we can't see, things we are blind to;

18 more days to see the new things God is doing;

18 more days to walk from the dark wood on the path God has set before us.

Amen. Thanks be to God.