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John 9 (*The man born blind*)

What is it that we need people to see?

After a woman died of lung cancer, her family reacted quickly to mention that she never smoked, knowing that the assumption is if she had lung cancer, she was a smoker. Her family wanted her to be remembered in that specific way.

We know that not everyone who smokes gets lung cancer, and not everyone with lung cancer has smoked. There is comfort to feel like there is a reason someone is afflicted with a disease. But what happens when there is no one to blame for an illness?

This is the question that many from our text are asking in today's reading from the Gospel of John. Consider what the gospel writer wants us to pay attention to, and where Jesus wants us to see. Our gospel writer doesn't draw out this healing, but instead, speaks to our own absurdity in trying to understand it when we so clearly don't.

The disciples ask about the man's blindness as a sin, whether the blindness was caused by his own sin or the sin of his parents. Jesus speaks it clearly to the disciples that the man's sin has nothing to do with the man's blindness, and the man's blindness has nothing to do with the man's sin; and then, Jesus heals him.

It's amazing, isn't it? That this sign, that this miraculous healing could happen, but no one speaks any words of comfort or joy. The only thing that folks were interested in was the how:

- How were your eyes opened? How'd Jesus do it?
- How could Jesus do that on the Sabbath? How could Jesus do that as a sinner?

I read this story, and even I'm tired for this man who has to tell his story multiple times for people to start not believing, not accepting, but simply listening to what happened, to who did it, to the feelings that it stirred up for him, to the faith that he now has to be so bold as to question the Pharisees and be driven out. But no one listened, and no one really saw him.

There is a relief when the brokenness fits our cause-and-effect understanding of how life is, as if life is supposed to be predictable, controllable and make sense all of the time. But then we're devastated when we learn that the "good people" are impacted or died in that earthquake or hurricane or car crash, not just the "bad people".

How many people felt the impact of the virus a little stronger and a little deeper after learning that Tom Hanks tested positive, as NBA players tested positive, as the first people in the United States and in Chicago started to die, rather than in countries that are oceans away?

It was never about who was bad or who was good or where sin came from, because that's not how God works in the world. It's always been about the healing love that God brings to us, even in the extraordinary salve made of saliva and mud. It's that healing love that allows the man born blind, it's that healing love that allows us to see Jesus for the first time the way that Jesus sees us all the time – as beloved children of God.

Think about what Jesus is showing us. Jesus comes into our lives and offers healing, then we try and make sense of it by rationalizing, justifying, domesticating and more, and for what? To replicate it? To disprove that this healing, love and mercy are possible, and only possible through the works – the powerful deeds – of God?

And when we've finally exhausted our hypotheses, when we're willing to dismiss, drive out and abandon altogether that which we can't understand, Jesus comes to us again and reveals himself to us as the true Messiah, who yearns for restoration and wholeness of the entire world through a faithful relationship with God who sees you and never looks away.

Jesus' light shines on those who are seen and those who go unseen.

Light shines on healing that is unpredictable, unexplainable, and unprecedented.

Light shines on how we react to extraordinary circumstances.

Light shines on us these days, that despite our commitment to connection through technology, it's hard to be working from home and it's especially hard to be working parents and caregivers. Jesus' light shines on our teachers who are superheroes and on our schools that serve as more than places for academic learning.

Jesus' light shines on our workers in the medical field and health occupations deserve medals of honor.

Jesus' light shines on God's good creation, which has started to heal and recover as a portion of humanity stay closer to home.

Jesus' light shines on systems that have discovered mercy forgiveness when it comes to loans and debt, as well as exposing those who benefit when humanity is sick and suffering.

Jesus' light continues to shine, whether we are 6 feet apart or 6,000,000 feet apart. When we can't be with one another in close proximity, Jesus' light shines all the brighter, calling us to wash our hands, follow to where that light leads us, and be a community that sees God and sees our neighbor, even from the comforts of our homes.

Let us hear Jesus' words... to go and wash in the pool and basins in our lives, so that our hands may be sent to spread the light of Jesus Christ and the sight of God's love.

Amen.