

February 27

Transfiguration of Our Lord

John 9:1-41

“Surely we’re not blind, are we?”

1. Today is Transfiguration Sunday and traditionally we would find ourselves on the mountain top
 - a. You may remember the story
 - b. Jesus took three disciples up the mountain, and there we see Jesus miraculously transformed
 - i. Suddenly, in front of the disciples, appeared Moses and Elijah with Jesus
 - ii. The disciples were afraid and confused by the sight
 - iii. and then a cloud enveloped the mountaintop God spoke from above: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”
 - iv. And as quickly as it began, it ended, and they looked up and saw only Jesus now
2. Well, today for Transfiguration Sunday we find ourselves not high up but instead down on the ground, with mud on our fingertips (or perhaps on our eyelids)
 - a. In the story Ben read today, we meet a man born blind who receives sight,
 - i. and in the process of explaining the miraculous healing, he gets to know Jesus with increasing depth and connection.
 - ii. I think that story functions like a kind of Transfiguration
 - b. I should first say that hearing the connection between blindness and sin is unfortunately not unusual for their culture at the time, but it seems that Jesus is disrupting that train of thought
 - i. I should also point out how the disciples (and later all other characters in the story) seem to lack any kind of compassion for the man – in contrast to Jesus.
 - c. And I ask your forgiveness as I struggle to tell this story without falling into an ableist framework (blind = bad)
 - d. There is a play on the notion of seeing and who really sees. It’s almost like two stories layered one on the other
 - i. At one level, this is story of a remarkable healing of a man born blind
 - ii. It is messy literally and figuratively
 1. Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with his saliva and dirt.
 2. (In another story Jesus uses only spit to heal a blind man -Mark 8)
 3. The healing is effective and permanent.
 4. But then it gets messy for this man, as he has to make his way through what felt like a field covered with social landmines
 - iii. Believe it or not, this healing upset the social fabric of their community
 1. First of all, he had been a blind beggar, and in a society where you “stayed in your place” he was thrust into the society in a new role which the people in power hadn’t assigned to him.
 - a. In fact, it is remarkable that they didn’t recognize him because he now had SIGHT!
 - b. Is this the guy who was blind and begged?
 - c. That meant they never really SAW him when they passed by him every day

2. Secondly, the healing was on a Sabbath, which the religious authorities claimed it was a violation of the Sabbath
 - a. They question the man in two distinct ways
 - i. Who healed you and how?
 - ii. Or were you ever really blind? We don't believe you.
 - b. They bring in the parents to testify, and yet the parents distance themselves from their own son (because they feared retribution by those in power for upsetting the social order)
 - c. The religious authorities didn't really see a person who had been healed, but a nuisance, a piece that didn't fit.
 - iv. And it is through the eyes of the man born blind that we see Jesus, transfigured through the span of the story for the man
 1. He first felt Jesus put mud on his eyes, heard him say "Go to Siloam and wash." And then he received my sight. He saw Jesus as a healer
 2. Then when questioned more, he saw Jesus as a prophet.
 3. He couldn't assert whether he saw Jesus as a sinner or not, but he was powerful.
 4. He receives the ire of the religious leaders, when he saw that Jesus comes from God because of this unprecedented healing
 5. And the final scene is when he sees Jesus fully as the one God had sent, the Son of Man / The Human One— at which point he worships Jesus
 - v. And Jesus then makes the statement that some may see physically and actually be blind spiritually.
 1. Surely not us? Cried some Pharisees.
 2. To which Jesus responds: Well, if you have to ask...
3. Last week we acknowledged just how hard it is to make sense of this "Jesus thing," and so today our challenge to follow Jesus' example considering what our blind spots are
 - a. Because we see clearly, or so we think, until it is Jesus who points out that maybe we don't
 - i. Maybe we weren't welcoming of gay people, until it was our child who said they were gay
 - ii. Maybe we judged the single mother, until we heard her story of courage to leave an abusive husband
 - iii. Maybe we questioned the person living in poverty, until we understood how many barriers society put in front of them daily
 - iv. Maybe we assumed not everything could be about race, until we took the time to know a person of color to realize it is actually white supremacy which makes everything about race
 - b. We don't hear much about how Jesus spiritually opened the eyes of all in the story so they could see that man with compassion, fully as a child of God. But we cringe when they don't.
 - c. And we know that the only one who saw Jesus fully was this man, this man who was invisible or dispensable up until Jesus made mud and smeared it on his eyelids.

- d. What do we see only when it fits our mindset and what do we refuse to see when it challenges it?
 - i. I think these are questions which require some soul searching.
 - ii. And today, on Transfiguration Sunday, whatever our answers are really make us ponder how it is we see Jesus
 - iii. How we see Jesus and how we see the world are intertwined
 - 1. Because then our service can be modeled after his compassion
 - 2. Our desire to right wrongs can be guided by his drive for justice
 - 3. Our priorities can be challenged by his sacrificial love
- 4. When Jesus opens our eyes it is messy: it's messy because we then can't unsee how he challenges us to view the world. And it's messy because then we have to see ourselves differently too. And in the process, we might see Jesus more fully too.

Reflection questions

1. Share a story when your point of view changed, and nothing was the same again for you.
2. Without using an ableist framework (blind=bad), how would you retell the story in John 9 of the man whom Jesus healed? What is it really about?
3. How does seeking to follow the teachings of Jesus create a change for how you act or how you think?