

*As Jesus walked along, he saw a man.*

The disciples saw a blind person and started looking for the sinner to blame.

Others saw a beggar.

But Jesus *saw a man*.

So while disciples and neighbors talked around him and about him, Jesus spoke to him.

Jesus addressed him if he were a person instead of a problem, a child of Israel instead of a child of sinners, a human being instead of a hard luck case, a topic of speculation, a spectacle, a theological case study or a public pity.

Jesus saw what no one else could see.

*He saw a man.*

Bible scholar Marcus Borg says there are four different Latin words for *faith*, and one of them is *visio*, or vision.

Faith is a way of seeing, and that is both the gift on offer and the threat in this gospel story.

The physical miracle of restored sight is remarkably quick and easy, in John's telling of it. The ripple effects of it, the ways people choose to see it, take an entire chapter to describe.

The man who had been blind since birth takes awhile to see with clarity who Jesus is; his *visio* comes gradually even though his physical vision came instantly.

Those around him, however, shuffle around in a blindness that will take Jesus far longer than a long chapter to cure.

It will take more than mud and spit and water to make the status quo see not a sinner but a man, and to make the world see that something so different and impossible and utterly new is not a threat but a gift.

How do we see the world, and the people who inhabit it, and what directs our vision?

When a figure with a seeing-eye dog or a walking stick scouting the sidewalk ahead approaches, what do we who have physical sight see?

Do we see a person, a victim, a misfortune, an opportunity to steal a wallet, a stranger to avoid, a problem we can't solve, or a beautiful mystery in whom God's works will somehow be revealed?

How we see makes all the difference in what we see, and who we see.

The disciples saw a blind person.

The neighbors and the others with them saw a beggar.

The religious authorities saw a problem, a threat to their carefully constructed worldview.

The man's parents saw a liability, a threat to their inclusion in the community, when they could also have seen a son at long last blessed with sight, an occasion for wonder and joy.

The man himself came to see the way the world saw him, and also to see the Son of Man who had first seen him, not as a beggar or as a blind son, but as a man.

*And he worshiped him.*

How do we see Jesus?

Is Jesus a prophet, a healer, a teacher, a sinner, a savior, the Son of Man, the light of the world, a magician, an interesting figure from history, a living Lord?

Is Jesus a sweet shepherd who blesses the status quo or a disruption who blows it open like the eyes of the man born blind?

Do we see Jesus as the protector of our priorities and godly guarantor of our assumptions or as the troublemaker who opens eyes and shines unwelcome light on truths we'd rather not face ourselves or allow others to see?

Have we locked Jesus into theological categories from which we refuse to let him escape, and do our questions about him, like the disciples' question about the man born blind, have answers that we would never have imagined?

Do we dare open our eyes wide enough to see Jesus as something we would never have imagined him to be: a sinner, maybe, a real human being, a man with sweat and sexuality, a Jew, a criminal, God almighty in vulnerable human skin, a conundrum, a mystery, a walking contradiction, a risen power, an unpredictable presence, a challenge to our unexamined assumptions, all of the above?

Do we have the courage and the depth of faith to speak such things, to ask such questions, to risk continuing to look at Jesus Christ, *the same yesterday, today and forever*, in the fearful possibility that he might change like all living people have the right to do?

Do we even consider him alive--do we really believe the hopeful but also haunting story of Easter?

And how do we see our other neighbors?

Do our eyes, our assumptions, our experiences and assessments limit those around us, particularly those we think we know and see best?

In training the facilitators for our Lenten home meetings, Julie Boleyn made an important point. She reminded us that people change, and unlike the parents and Pharisees in today's gospel, we should have the courage to let them be something other than we have already judged or decided or pigeonholed them to be.

The irritating person may say something profound or beautiful.  
The reliable person may say the wrong thing, or nothing at all.

The predictable person may say or do something utterly unpredictable and unexpected.  
How will we receive this--as a threat, or as a gift?

Will we widen our sight or tighten our circle--open ourselves up or throw them out?  
How will we see one another?

Will we allow Jesus to rub an unwelcome mess in our face and open our eyes and chance the perilous consequences of seeing more than we've ever seen before?

Today's gospel is full of possibilities, from the man whose sight comes instantly to the same man whose sight comes gradually to the parents whose eyes are closed in fear of what other people might say or think or do to the Pharisees who see the truth so clearly that they refuse to look to the whole spectrum of sightlines among the disciples and neighbors and others.

Those of us who have been washed in the baptismal font, the pool named Sent, are sent forward on a path of widening vision, of opening eyes and gradually increasing sight, a trajectory of seeing more and more, at times suddenly, at times slowly, at times leading us to help others see, at times inciting others to drive us out, to send us away.

Sometimes we have the courage, the faith, the vision, the sight to get into such sacred trouble.

Sometimes we don't.

Either way, however, Jesus finds us.

When we are blind, he sees us.

When we are thrown out, he searches until he finds us.

Whether or not we see him, he sees us, and he keeps working on our vision until we truly and fully see.

*Do you believe in the Son of Man*, he asks, and even though we've seen him, we don't know who he's talking about.

The Son of Man is the one on whom the angels of God ascend and descend; he is Jacob's ladder connecting heaven and earth, he told Nathanael, the disciple under the tree whom Jesus saw back in chapter one.

The Son of Man is the saliva in God's mouth, John tells us, the eternal Word mixed with the mud of earth, the strange and healing combination of heaven and here, the mud in our eye that soils our appearances, that ruins our make-up and makes us see.

The Son of Man is the moist, messy mixture of spirit and spit, of dirt and divinity, of heaven and humanity that opens our eyes to see what we have never seen before: the bloody beauty of the cross, the textured nuance of our neighbors and the twisted truth about ourselves, the wonder and wickedness of the world around us, the intricate dance between death and life, the detail and dimension and depth of grace.

He sees us, and he will continue to work on our eyes until they are fully and finally closed, and he finds us, and he speaks to us, and he touches us, and we see for the first time.