

## "Light and Darkness"

Scripture Reading: John 9: 1-41

I remember going to Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico with my family during a vacation when I was about 13 years old. In those days, there were still guided tours led by National Park Rangers. A group of about 100 or so would follow the ranger down the narrow paths that would take visitors through the rooms of stalactites and stalagmites with the sound of water dripping here and there and slick spots on the paths that needed careful attention when walking. The ranger would stop now and then and offer commentary on what the visitors were seeing. When the tour reached its midway point, there was a large room with wooden benches upon which the visitors would sit while the ranger gave a more lengthy explanation of how the cave was formed over the eons of time and how the features of the cave came about. At some point, the ranger would ask that all the lights be turned off for a few moments so the visitors could experience total darkness. I remember him telling us to put our hands up in front of our faces so we could see that we could not see anything, everything was totally dark. It was a scary thought to think that perhaps the light may fail to be turned on again but thankfully after just what may have been 30 seconds the lights once again were on. I remember hearing sighs of relief that once again we could all see each other and the surrounding everywhere.

We all have 5 senses that help us in life to negotiate all we encounter. Some have asked others to think about what sense one could give up more easily and still be able to live independently. When I have considered this question, I think that one could more easily cope with not being able to feel touch, to not smell, to not taste something, or even hear, and still remain as independent as before but losing one's sight completely would be so limiting that persons or devices to assist would be needed to replace sight. We need all of our 5 senses to go through life as well as we can without a lot of help from others in society but losing one's sight suddenly puts us in a position of risk that perhaps losing the other senses would not. I hope none of us who have all of these gifts will have to experience such.

I taught special needs students at times in my teaching career and worked closely with non-sighted persons and found it remarkable that they could do all they did with little or no help. It seems, as we have often heard, that the other senses compensate for the lack of one sense. I was pastor to a special young man at the last church I served. He lost his sight at the age of two when a tumor was removed from his brain. He passed away just a year ago during my first year as pastor at First Presbyterian Church. He was one of the most remarkable persons I have known. He was always friendly and cheerful and loved laughing and joking. I remember entering a room one time without speaking and he said "Hello, Pastor Jerry" when I entered the room. He knew something about my identity without even seeing me.

In John 9, Jesus encounters a man who is blind not far from the Pool of Siloam. His disciples were quick to judge and they wanted to know if he was blind because he had sinned or because his parents had sinned. People in the ancient world often thought that illness and disabilities came about because of sin, that God had cursed them because of their sin. Jesus was quick to correct his disciples in this matter. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." (v. 3) Then, Jesus identifies himself as the one who can bring sight and light to the world as well as to this blind man when he says, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (v.5)

Then, Jesus called the man to himself and give him something to do. "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." (v. 7) The man obeyed Jesus' command and came back able to see. His sight had been given to him. People who observed the man were unsure if he was the blind man they had often seen begging in this place and a discuss begins about his identity and how his healing happened. Jesus, in the meantime, had made an exit because they begin to look for Jesus and cannot find him.

The Pharisees enter the text then and want to know how it happened, for it was the Sabbath day and healing on the Sabbath was forbidden. This good act of healing that Jesus performed for one who needed his sight suddenly turned into a controversy. Can one do a good act on the Sabbath (which was considered to be work which is forbidden on the Sabbath) or does the good in the act negate the work that is implied in it? The blind man is quizzed about how this thing took place and he testified that it was Jesus who worked this miracle. The Pharisees even call the man's parents to be sure it is he and not someone else and they too are quizzed about what happened. The Pharisees declared that Jesus was a sinner because he worked on the Sabbath day. And, at that point, the blind man says the most memorable and meaningful verse of the text, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know that though I was blind, now I see." (v. 25)

Personal experience always triumphs over an argument. People who do not understand the works of God may argue over how and even if they happen but to someone who has had an experience, no amount of explanation can define what God has done. As Jesus told the woman at the well, "God is a spirit, and must be worshiped in spirit and truth." (John 4:24) The presence of God is pervasive, reaching into every corner of humanity and discerning the needs and capabilities of all. God is always ready to provide what humans need, if humans will only speak to God and ask God's will to be done in their lives. God always answers prayer, not always in the way we request of God, but in the way that God knows is best for us. I do not know why God would not want to provide physical healing for someone who is ill or intervention into a life that is wracked with pain or tragedy but knowing that God is ultimately in control gives us peace and comfort in our times of need.

Jesus finds the blind man in the crowd among the naysayers and the religious authorities to let him know the source of his healing. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Jesus asks. "And who is he, sir. Tell me, so that I may believe in him," the blind man replied. "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he," Jesus told him. "Lord, I believe," is the man's statement of faith. (John 9:35-38) The man who had been blind believed and then worshiped Jesus. His physical blindness was conquered by the light of the world who stood before him. The blindness of the Pharisees was not physical but spiritual. They could not open their minds enough to comprehend that Jesus could be the Messiah that they had been hoping for during so many centuries of darkness of oppression. He did not fit the mold that they imagined and he would not be their Savior.

When we encounter the Risen Christ, the spiritual blindness of our lives disappears. We find in him a light that conquers all the darkness of life. Even deep darkness that seems to envelop the entire world yields to the brightness of Christ. The lives of all are illuminated by the light that only Jesus can give. As we continue to deal with the unknown in our world, it is a form of blindness that must be conquered. God will give wisdom to those who are seeking a cure for the current disease that wants to conquer humankind. That wisdom will bring relief and light to all who need to experience it. We must not lose hope because hope is the belief that sustains us even in the darkest of hours.