

The Man Born Blind - John 9

I was blind, but now I see. That's all I know. Jesus is the light of the world.

John's gospel is a study of contrasts: blindness, sight; darkness, light; belief, unbelief. It's a world of black and white. I'm a "both/and" kind of guy and I find myself very uncomfortable with John's matter-of-fact dualities. On top of all that, this story is full of misunderstandings. Some said that the man who was healed was not the one born blind but one who only looked like him. Some said that Jesus was a sinner because he broke the sabbath. Some wondered if the man born blind was born that way because he or his parents had sinned. This was the world of Jesus' day, full of misconceptions about reality, not unlike our own.

One thing the man born blind story says to me has to do with clarity. It seems at times that I fall prey to confusion and I am in need of the clarity that Jesus brings. Jesus is the light of the world. And not unlike the people in his day, I often invent reasons to justify my own unwillingness to acknowledge what's right in front of me. The Pharisees ask: "Can a man born blind, a sinner, teach the righteous?" They had constructed their own reality to soften the culpability of their choices. How often do we do that to ourselves? Like the blind man we are all born that "God's works might be revealed" not obscured like they were treating them. It's uncanny: a man who for all of his life was not able to see is given sight and the Pharisees who could see for all of their lives are blinded.

This clarity that Jesus gives is for everyone who follow him. He proclaimed: "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jo. 8:12) I

can bear witness to that promise. In my sixty plus years, I have had my share of dark days, days on end where it seemed like the sun wouldn't shine again. But somehow that darkness did not extinguish this light which Jesus speaks of. Jesus is the light of the world. He is the one who shines in my darkness, healing my blindness. He is "the true light that gives light to everyone." (Jo. 1:9)

At the end of the story, Jesus asks a question of the man born blind. He does not ask him: "Can you see the Son of Man?" He asks: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" John is asking us that question too. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Do I believe in the Son of Man?" And in a touch of irony, when the man born blind asks, "who is this Son of Man that I might believe in him", Jesus says: "You're looking at him. He is speaking to you."

I believe that Jesus is speaking to us too. I believe that we are looking at him too. I think that the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins expresses this so well in a poem titled, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire". The poem concludes with the following three lines:

"For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
to the Father through the features of men's faces."¹

I was blind, but now I see. That's all I know. Jesus is the light of the world.

¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose (Penguin Classics, 1985)