

## (Transfiguration of the Lord)

John 9:1-41

If you watched the Super Bowl, did you see the Dirty Dancing commercial with Eli Manning and Odell Beckham, Jr.?

Seeing the commercial and reading John's Gospel story of the Blind Man reminded me an exchange in the movie, Dirty Dancing, between "Baby" Houseman's father and Patrick Swayze's character, Johnny.

Johnny comes to see her father to say, "Thank you" for his medical help his friend, Penny. Johnny wants Baby's father to "see" her for the wonderful young woman she is, one who "looks" up to him.

Baby's father responds, angrily: **"Don't you tell me what to see! I see someone in front of me who got his partner in trouble and sent her off to some butcher, while he moved on to an innocent young girl like my daughter!"**

After a moment of silence, Johnny says: **"Yeah, I guess that's what you would see."**

Last Sunday we talked about identity and reputation. We see people, and make judgements based on preconceived biases or limited knowledge based on the color of their skin, their religion, their economic status, their appearances, how they live or where they come from.

Helen Keller was blind, but she had incredible vision, and could see and understand in ways few people could. She said: **"The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight but no vision."**

I think she and Johnny both understood, what the Blind Man came to understand, sometimes those of us who can see, are really blind, and those who are blind, have the best vision of all.

Our own blindness and God's ability to heal our vision are the themes of our hymns this morning.

John Newton, as you may recall, was the captain of a slave ship. He treated his human cargo, as simply that, cargo. He was unable to see them for who they were - human beings like himself, who like him, reflected the sacred image of God. **"I was blind,"** Newton wrote, **"but now I see."**

When it comes to seeing God in other human beings, especially ones who are different than us, aren't we all a bit blind like Newton?

Author, Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book, ***Light Without Sight: A Different Way of Seeing***, tells the story of **Jacques Lusseyran**.

While not born blind, he lost his sight as young 7 year old boy. He was goofing off with his friends at school, when he was accidentally shoved into the edge of the teacher's desk. His glasses broke, injuring both eyes, leaving him totally blind.

**“Blind yes,”** he said, **“but not without sight!”** His parents never pitied him. They would not let his blindness become a hinderance to his learning. They actually felt that their son, while blind, would learn to “see” in new ways.

Lusseyran recalls **“soon after his accident his father, who deeply understood the spiritual life, said, ‘Always tell us when you discover something.’”**

A few weeks after his accident, Lusseyran made this discovery: **“I had completely lost the sight of my eyes; I could not see the light of the world anymore. Yet the light was still there....This was something entirely new, you understand, all the more so since it contradicted everything that those who have eyes believe. The source of light is not in the outer world. We believe that it is only because of a common delusion. The light dwells where life also dwells: within ourselves.”** (Against the Pollution of the I)

*“The light dwells where life also dwells: within ourselves.”*

He was blind, but now he could finally “see” in new ways, that changed his life!

Do you think with practice we could overcome our own blindness?

Blind from birth is what the writer of the Gospel of John tells us the man is in our story. Without eyes to see, he is forced to the margins of society, begging for a living, hoping people will pity his condition, and help him. Into his life, walks Jesus and his disciples, who are trying to keep up! Aren't we all?

Seeing the “Blind Man,” the Disciples raise an interesting question about the human condition and suffering; asking Jesus: **“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”**

Jesus responds to them, saying: **“Neither this man nor his parents sinned; We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”**

Jesus then spits into some dirt, makes mud, and rubs it into his eyes, telling the Blind Man, to go and wash in the Pool of Siloam, which means “Sent”.

The Blind Man goes, washes, and returns, able to see!

Ironically, it is now everyone else in the story who are blind!

The neighbors could only see him as a blind beggar. The Pharisees can only see him as a theological conundrum; the product of a rebellious act by this guy Jesus that violated the sacred religious laws of God! His parents, can only see fear of being made social outcasts by both their faith community and their neighbors. None of them could see God at work right in front of their eyes!

Blinded by their own theological and social concerns, lacking the ability to “see” God in this healing act, the faith community drives the man who had regained his vision, out of their sight!

Barbara Brown Taylor asks: **“What if something is not God and we believe that it is?”** Likewise she asks, **“What if something is God, and we don’t believe that it is?”**

Jesus words about who really sees and who is truly blind, upset the Pharisees. With an indignant self-righteousness, they ask Jesus, **“Surely, you are not saying we are blind, are you?”**

A very good question. Are the Pharisees and others, blind? What about our own ability to truly see God at work in our midst? Where are our own spiritual blind spots that prevent us from truly seeing God in others?

In her book, **“Small, Great Things,”** author Jodi Picoult, speaks to the issue of this type of blindness. In a conversation between her two main characters, Ruth, a Labor and Delivery nurse, who is black and has been accused of a crime, and Kennedy McQuarrie, a Public Defender, who is white.

Race is the issue. In defense of our own way of seeing people of color as a white person, Kennedy says to Ruth, **“I don’t see color!”** To which Ruth responds: **“You say you don’t see color...but that’s all you see. You’re so hyperaware of it, and of trying to look like you aren’t prejudiced, you can even understand that when you say race doesn’t matter all I hear is you dismissing what I’ve felt, what I’ve lived, what it’s like to be put down because of the color of my skin.”**

What about you? How do you see and react to another person whose skin color is different than yours? Most of us, including me, do not want to believe we see, react and judge others based on the skin color or appearance of another person. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, aren’t we blind to our own prejudices and privileges as white people?

I can’t answer that one for you. What I can tell you is Picoult’s book made me take a long, hard look at my own blind spots when it comes to my own systemic racist tendencies. It made me uncomfortable to do so. **“I am blind, but now, I hope and pray I see better.”**

Daniel B. Clendenin in his blog, *Journey With Jesus*, says: **“One of the most dangerous spiritual places we can live is in the deluded notion that we are fully-sighted, spiritually-speaking. Conversely, the healthiest place to live is...to acknowledge our spiritual blindness....”**

Barbara Brown Taylor wonders about her own spiritual blindness, writing: **“It makes me wonder how seeing has made me blind—by giving me cheap confidence that one quick glance at things (or people) can tell me what (or who) they are, by distracting me from learning how the light inside me works, by fooling me into thinking that I have a clear view of how things (and people) really are...of who can see rightly and who cannot....”**

When you think about it, we are all blind, each in our own way. **“Seeing,”** we would agree, **“is everything”**. Acknowledging our spiritual blindness so can we learn to “see” through the lens of God is what Jesus invites us to consider this morning.