

Robin Dodge  
Holy Faith, Santa Fe  
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Lent 4 – Year A  
1 Samuel 16.1-13  
Psalm 23  
Ephesians 5.8-14  
John 9.1-41

In the name of the one, true, and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's Gospel story is one of the best healing stories in the Bible. Jesus heals a man blind from birth. It's a wonderful story and it's a comforting story for everyone who suffers from a disability or has a child or other loved one who suffers from a disability. Jesus' disciples ask him, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" This notion of some sort of connection between sin and suffering was common in Old Testament times when people believed that punishment for the sins of one's forebears would be visited on the succeeding generations. The disciples' question, "who sinned?", is still asked today, often by hospital patients, infertile couples, accident victims, parents of a child born with Down Syndrome. Jesus puts such unhelpful and damaging speculation to rest. Jesus tells his disciples and us, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

So that God's works might be revealed in him: Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that reassuring? God's works can be revealed through suffering. God's works can be revealed through disease. God's works can be revealed through disabilities. Karl Barth, the famous German theologian of the last century, observed that what seems to interest Jesus in healing stories is not that people are sinners (after all, we all are!), but that they are sufferers. And we all are sufferers too.

Jesus says we must work the works of the one who sent him while it is day - and Jesus isn't using the royal "we." Jesus means that you and I are called to do the works of God, and with Jesus as the light of the world, it's always day for us to do God's works and reveal God's grace and power. And Jesus sets out to do just that! Without asking the blind man if he wants to be healed, Jesus shows God's grace and power and gives the blind man sight. Jesus spits on the ground, makes mud with his saliva, spreads the mud on the man's eyes, and tells him to wash in a pool of water nearby. The blind man goes and washes in the pool and comes back able to see.

We can't say as much for the formerly blind man's neighbors and those who knew him before his healing. They remember him as a beggar and they don't see him as healed. Some of them don't even recognize him! Despite his protests that it's him, they persist in their own blindness and keep asking him how his eyes were opened. He tells them that Jesus made mud and anointed his eyes with it, and then he went to the pool and washed and received his sight.

Now it was the Sabbath when Jesus heals the man born blind, and it's against the law to make mud on the Sabbath, let alone using your ritually unclean spit to do so! So the Pharisees haul in the formerly blind man to ask him how he received his sight. The formerly blind man explains without implicating Jesus. Nevertheless, some of the Pharisees don't see how Jesus could be from God because he violated the Sabbath. Others wonder how could a sinner perform such a miraculous healing. So they ask the formerly blind man what he thinks, and he replies that Jesus is a prophet.

The Pharisees don't see Jesus as a prophet, and they don't even see the formerly blind man as having been born blind! So they go and ask his parents if they

had a blind son and, if so, how does he now see. Not wanting to run afoul of the Pharisees, the parents acknowledge their son was born blind, but they don't claim to know how he now sees.

So the Pharisees ask the formerly blind man again, and this time they tell him to tell the truth - or at least in accord with the way they see things! They know that Jesus is a sinner. The formerly blind man doesn't see Jesus as a sinner, but he does know that once he was blind and now he sees. But the Pharisees still don't see how he gained his sight, so they ask him once again how Jesus opened his eyes! Not only do they not see, now they don't listen! The formerly blind man, exasperated at this point by the Pharisees' own blindness, claims that Jesus can't be a sinner and must be from God to open the eyes of one born blind, and suggests that Jesus could open their eyes too! The Pharisees chafe at what they see as his impertinence, as they see him born entirely in sin - the very notion that Jesus debunked at the outset! So they cast him out.

Jesus, who casts no sinner out, catches up with the formerly blind man and asks him if he believes in the Son of Man. The formerly blind man answers by asking, "who is he, sir, ... that I may believe in him?" Jesus tells him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." The formerly blind man moves from calling Jesus "sir" to "Lord, I believe." He experiences not only physical healing, but spiritual healing as well. His healing is complete and he worships Jesus.

Jesus says, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." For the formerly blind man, seeing is believing. For the Pharisees, seeing is not believing, but leads to blindness. Jesus is always turning things on their head. The Pharisees who think they see

everything clearly can't learn anything. The formerly blind man knows he can't see but is open to learning. Where are we blind? When do we think we see everything clearly, but we don't see what's right in front of us? What are our preconceived ideas that blind us to new possibilities? Has our sight failed us because of trouble, as the psalmist says? Where are we in need of healing?

As Jesus did for the man born blind, so he can heal us and give us our sight. All we have to do is to see our way clear to believing that Jesus is Lord and can perform the works of God. It's not the physical healing that is the focus of this story, but the spiritual healing that gives the formerly blind man new sight to believe the bright truth of Jesus' power and God's glory that works through us quote - unquote "sinners." It's that same spiritual healing that frees us from our own blindness so that God's works may be revealed in us.

Amen.