

Sight and Insight
Ephesians 5: 8-4 and John 9: 1-21
Sunday, March 2, 2008 - Rev. Jim Cullen

This morning I would like to introduce you to two people, both of whom were members of a congregation I served in east-end Toronto. The first person is Arthur. He lived one block west and seven blocks north and one and one-half blocks west of the church. At least that is what he told me the first Sunday I met him. Arthur was blind. He either came to church alone or with his young granddaughter. He knew in his mind where he was going and how to get home again. His frustration would be evidenced only if he got to the church door before it was unlocked. If his granddaughter was with him they might try another door. Otherwise, he would wait until someone else came along. Arthur was a man with no sight but insight.

The second person I want to tell you about is Dorothea. She lost her eyesight gradually in her senior years. She used to come to church on the street car, cross busy Main Street and enter the church by the side door. After losing her sight she assumed for a while that she could no longer attend church. She could not see to cross the street. Then, with insight that replaced sight, she realized that if she rode the street car around the loop she could get off right beside the front door of the church.

Two people lost their vision but retained their insight, their ability to live and worship and continue to be part of the community. The gospel lesson for this Fourth Sunday in Lent is about Jesus healing a man who was blind. It is about a lot more. Let's look at the story.

This lesson is many layered in its meaning. Personal blindness, class blindness, institutional blindness, moral blindness – all mingled in this story. The incident itself is straight forward.

Jesus and his disciples met a young man, blind from birth. Jesus uses his blindness to point out that his blindness is not the result of anything he did. He then heals the man.

The first group to enter the story is the neighbours. They don't know what to make of this strange event. They wonder and they ask questions. Their inability to understand and to accept this extraordinary event is quite reasonable. They never doubt that this man can now see. But they don't understand what happened. They then look to other authorities for an explanation.

The next group on the scene is the Pharisees, the members of the community who pride themselves as living by the law. They too, do not deny what has taken place. Whether the healing happened or not was not of interest to them. They are not interested in the well-being of the man. They are interested in the rules and regulations. Their concern was that Jesus was healing on the Sabbath.

The others gather around. They think the healing is a fake. They look for and find the man's parents. The parents say as little as possible, hoping to avoid getting into some controversy. They do, however, confirm that their son was born blind.

The end of the story- beautiful, a little sad, and full of irony – has Jesus looking for the man. They meet and the young man becomes a believer. Then John, the writer, makes explicit the point for telling this story. John is addressing his own society late in the first century. People thought that life was good, that they had great insights through

science, philosophy, art, music, drama and religion. Yet there was so much more to see. They did not see who Jesus was. They did not see where God was leading them.

Paul, in the other lessons this morning speaks to a society that is self-indulgent and has only a veneer of civility. He reminds them that into this darkness has come a shaft of light, sent by God to turn things upside down. It shows another way to live, a way toward self-discipline and hope. The lessons this morning encourage us to challenge the blind spots in our lives.

It is easy for us to ignore the needs of others around us. It is easy to assume that someone else will make the difference in the lives of others. Often it is the unknown that makes us blind. When we do not know someone, share the same culture or history or experiences we can easily draw a circle that keeps others out. Making friends out of strangers is the Spirit of Jesus in action.

Congregations have blind spots too. The strength of any congregation comes from providing a safe place for people to gather, where individuality is welcomed, where the past is respected and the future is welcomed. It is a place to explore both doubts and faith. It is where we can learn to turn words into deeds. It is where we can learn from others. It is place where laughter and tears are equally at home.

The world of business is full of blind spots. Larry Krotz writes in the recent edition of *The Observer*. The article is about the tribulations of Conrad Black and Brian Mulroney. As he followed the story he say, “I had a certain incredulity, as if observing a train wreck in slow motion, watching these very vain men, largely self-made men struggle and wanting to shout at them, ‘It didn’t have to be this way’.” Then he goes on to say, “A series of bad judgments orchestrated under the rubric of greed, hubris, simple stupidity, carelessness and egotism can leave the life and reputation of even the most gifted and blessed in tatters.” Blind spots in public and private life take away opportunity for making life better for others.

Contrast that story with this one. Pepsi was looking for a new CEO. No sooner had Indra Nooyi got word that she had the top job that she got on a plane to Cape Cod, where Mike White, her main challenger for the job, was vacationing. The two had worked together for years. Both were rising stars in the company. Both loved music. As Nooyi plane landed on Cape Cod, there was White waiting for her, there to congratulate her. Back at his beach house, he played piano, she sang. Before she left she said to him, “Tell me whatever I need to do to keep you, and I will do it.” A new team was born and PepsiCo was the winner. Some leaders have the foresight to see that working together has tremendous benefits.

In every circle of our lives there are times when we are blind to what is around us – lost opportunities. Our lives follow the story of the healing of the blind man. We don’t understand and therefore miss the unexpected. We think it can’t be because it is not supposed to happen this way. We even look at what is real and write it off as “fake”, all because it is outside of our past experience. The man was blind, then he could see, and then he believed. We will sing later, “*I see a new heaven. I see a new earth as the old one will pass away, where the fountain of life flows and without price goes to all people who abide in the land.*”(713)

On this fourth Sunday in Lent we are challenged to see ourselves, each other and the world in a new light. Living in the light of God’s love is seeing the world through new eyes – new beauty, new opportunities, new experiences of the good that

humans can do for each other. To repeat a sentence for the OT lesson two weeks ago ...***God blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others.*** God offer us new things to see, new ways to see them, and new ways to lighten the dark corners of our lives. As the hymn goes "*We are marching in the light of God, we are marching in the light of God.*"(646)