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Lent IV A (John 9:1-41)

Well, that was more like a novella than a Gospel lesson...

Think about it. A man born blind is healed of his inability to see. Jesus rubs spit and mud on his eyes, he washes in a sacred pool and his sight is restored. And there are many who don't believe. Who try to put a spin on it – the Pharisees were divided, other Jews declare that it simply isn't possible and try to put the blame on a sinner who happens to be Jesus, but the once-blind man is adamant: a sinner couldn't have restored his sight.

"Lord, I believe."

And Jesus declares to the Pharisees, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

That's not very encouraging.

In fact, I find this whole story a bit disturbing. I mean, the miracle of restored sight is a wonderful story, full of hope, full of promise, another sign that this man Jesus is, indeed, divinely empowered by God.

But it's the reaction from the Pharisees that troubles me.

*Why don't they get it?*

I think it's Jesus' way of exposing their misuse of power, their misuse of authority, their misuse of privilege. And Jesus exposes that sort of calumny all through the Gospels, especially in the Gospel of our Patron Saint, John. The Pharisees, sometimes referred to as "the Jews," are all over themselves trying to expose Jesus as a fraud – *because it is so obvious that he has power, and they cannot abide a newcomer taking power from them.*

So when this harassed formerly blind man declares that only a man of God could perform this miracle they try to shift the responsibility: "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?!" *How dare you speak to your superiors in this way!*

It's like how a lot of white people react when a person of color says "Black lives matter."

*"I'm not a racist! I have an African-American friend!"*

*"How can you say that our society is racist? This is the post-racism world!"*

Oh, yeah?

Tell that to the mother who tells her son not to leave the house in a hoodie.

Tell that to a father who tells his daughter to drive just under the speed limit.

Tell that to the people of Flint, *who still have no safe water.*

Tell that to our governmental so-called leaders who want to deprive poor children a hot meal because “it doesn’t do any good.”

Tell that to our representatives who would rather build up our military than provide healthcare to the poor – affecting people of color in a disproportionate number.

Post-racism? I don’t think so...

It happens over and over again. The Pharisees simply cannot *stand* this upstart, this Galilean, Jesus, because he is speaking truth to power. Rather than welcoming Jesus’ presence in their midst, or even the *sign* of Jesus’ presence, they turn to blame. Shaming the man whose blindness was restored, evicting him from the synagogue, and, ultimately, supporting the death penalty because their power was threatened.

I heard the Archbishop of Canterbury speaking to the House of Lords after the tragedy on Westminster Bridge; he addressed the core values of society, the core values of humanity, where even someone with a distorted view of society who only sees death as an alternative, where even someone who has just killed a number of people, is medically treated with compassion, where there is a victory of good over evil. We’ve heard such forgiving words from the Amish families in Pennsylvania who forgave the man who killed their children. We’ve heard such deep spiritual absolution uttered by families in South Carolina who actually *forgave* Dylann Roof for the massacre at Emmanuel African American Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015.

I find those acts of mercy to be extraordinary.

Because they speak truth.

They speak of God’s unrelenting compassion and their understanding of mercy. They speak of, in the words of Archbishop Justin, the victory of good over evil.

And to whom can we better turn for such victory than to Jesus Christ.

When we answer evil for evil we place ourselves in deep moral jeopardy. And yes: Responding to evil with forgiveness is possibly the hardest work we Christians are asked to do.

But we have an exemplary model in Christ Jesus. Not only does he respond with kindness and compassion during his life time, but even from the Cross he says, “Father, forgive them.”

No wonder the Pharisees don’t get it. It’s unheard of, this response of mercy.

But it is what we are called to do.

We are called as communities of faith to speak passionately for those who have no voice. We are called as communities of faith to speak truth to power. We are called as communities of faith to wear our hearts – our safety pins, our badges, our tee-shirts, our demonstration placards – to wear our hearts on our sleeves. To proclaim by word and deed that power does not automatically mean right. That power must care for the most vulnerable. That power must listen.

We are called to proclaim the victory of goodness over evil, the victory of light over darkness, the victory of life over death.

That, my friends, is very good news indeed.

Now we just have to be a little less shy and a lot more vocal. We've gotta make some noise.

And raise a joyful sound to the Lord.

Amen.