

From Blindness to Sight

John 9:1-41

The famous hymn writer Fanny Crosby lost her sight at the age of six months. In her lifetime she wrote over 8,000 hymns and gospel songs, 1,000 poems, and two autobiographies. She was a teacher at a school for the blind and was very involved in mission work throughout her life. When questioned about how her blindness affected her life it is reported she replied:

"It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me." She also once said, "when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior"

I have no doubt that Fanny was rewarded with her first sight being that of the face of Jesus. She said she felt it was a blessing that she had been blind, so as not to be distracted by the beauty of Creation. Do you think you could see blindness as a blessing? We don't know what the man in today's story thought of his blindness, but we know how he felt about the one who restored his sight.

Let's take a closer look at what is happening in today's text. "As he went along," it begins. We know Jesus walked wherever he went and often encountered people with various ailments seeking healing from him. However, the blind man in our story does not approach Jesus for healing, Jesus takes the opportunity to teach the disciples about God's grace using the man as his teaching tool. We know Jesus spoke to the man, so he would be familiar with Jesus' voice, but after regaining his sight, the man went home without ever seeing Jesus.

As the man encountered friends, neighbors, and people who had seen him begging in the marketplace, all were dumbfounded by how different he appeared. So much so that debate arose about whether he really was the blind man they had known for so many years. It was only his personal testimony that convinced everyone he was, in fact, the man born blind: ¹¹ He answered (them), "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight."

So, it should be with anyone who believes in Jesus. We should look, sound, and act differently than we did before we knew Jesus. This makes me think of the singer, Jelly Roll, and his acceptance speech at the Grammy Awards in February. He said:

“I know they’re going to try to kick me off here, so just let me try to get this out. First of all, Jesus, I hear you and I’m listening, Lord. I am listening, Lord” ...

“There was a time in my life, y’all, that I was broken. That’s why I wrote this album. I didn’t think I had a chance, y’all. There was days that I thought the darkest things. I was a horrible human.”

Holding up a pocket-sized Bible, he continued, “There was a moment in my life that all I had was a Bible this big and a radio the same size and a 6 by 8 foot cell.”

“And I believe that those two things could change my life. I believe that music had the power to change my life. And God had the power to change my life.”

“I want to tell y’all right now, Jesus is for everybody. Jesus is not owned by one political party. Jesus is not owned by no music label. Jesus is Jesus, and anybody can have a relationship with him. I love you, Lord.”

Unfortunately, as with any change, not everyone is going to be happy about the change. People want to downplay Jelly Roll’s conversion to Christianity, preferring to remember him instead as an addict and drug dealer. In our story today, the Pharisees are not happy with the change they see. When the man was brought before them, instead of rejoicing that one of their own had been healed, they grilled him about who, how,

and when ...repeatedly. They declared that Jesus couldn't be from God because he healed on the Sabbath. Anyone who would heal on the Sabbath must be a sinner in their book. Their traditions over ruled the wisdom that the God of love, grace, and compassion could and would heal on a holy day.

Trying desperately to dismantle this man's claim of having sight restored and having it done by this thorn-in-their-side, Jesus, his parents were called in to question them about this purported miracle. They affirmed that this man was indeed their son and that he was born blind, but beyond that they had nothing to offer. Their son, being an adult, was free to speak for himself.

This can happen to new believers for any number of reasons. Those who know and love them find it hard to accept the new person they have become. They turn a blind eye to the new person, trying desperately to hold onto the old person they knew before. The new Christian may no longer fit in with the society they came from. In the case of the blind man's parents, the new person he had become could cost them their place in the synagogue, so they put a little distance between themselves and their son saying he was free to speak for himself.

The Pharisees again questioned the man, encouraging him to denounce Jesus as a sinner. His response, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." That was

enough to get the man thrown out of the synagogue. The Pharisees, who had long awaited God's Messiah, were blind to who Jesus was. No wonder they earned Jesus' rebuke as "blind guides." They were not able to see the hand of God in the healing of the man born blind, or any of the other miracles that Jesus performed.

Hearing that the man had been removed from the synagogue, Jesus sought him out and revealed himself as the Son of Man. Nearby Pharisees heard Jesus say, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." They understood he was referring to them and asked what they were blind too. His response was, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains." Because they could see Jesus and the things he had done yet still did not believe he was the Son of God, they remained in the sin of unbelief.

Perhaps you've heard it said, "Believe none of what you hear and only half of what you see." When you put seeing and hearing together, though, things can come into clearer focus. The man born blind did not see Jesus in order to believe in him. The Pharisees who could see Jesus and all the things he did, still did not believe in him. Their spiritual blindness was their sin.

The man born blind was healed of both physical and spiritual blindness through Jesus' healing touch. The Pharisees', though they possessed

physical sight, they remained spiritually blind. What would Jesus say to us today? How clear is our sight?

Some of us have come from faith traditions that left little room for those who are different or who have changed in ways that didn't perfectly align with the church's beliefs. We have felt the weight of the Pharisees disapproval. As we leave here today, let us allow Jesus to be open our eyes and be our light, shining so we can see clearer the path he would have us tread. May it be so.

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