

Community Presbyterian Church
Cedar City, Utah
Pastor John Guthrie

John 9.1-41
“The Light of the World”

How many Christians does it take to change a light bulb? Well, it depends on what variety of Christian you are.

- ✧ Charismatic's: Only one. Note: hands are already in the air.
- ✧ Pentecostals: Ten. One to change the bulb, and nine to pray against the spirit of darkness.
- ✧ Roman Catholics: None. Candles only.
- ✧ Baptists: At least 15. One to change the light bulb, and three committees to approve the change and decide who brings the potato salad and fried chicken.
- ✧ Episcopalians: Three. One to call the electrician, one to mix the drinks, and one to talk about how much better the old light bulb was.
- ✧ Nazarene Christians: Six. One person to replace the bulb while five review the church lighting policy.
- ✧ Lutherans: None. Lutherans don't believe in change.
- ✧ Methodists: Seven. One to change the bulb while the remaining six hold a committee meeting to affirm that the bulb-changing operation is a free-will response to the grace of God.
- ✧ Presbyterians: None. Lights will go on and off at predestined times.
- ✧ Amish Christians: What's a light bulb?

Today's reading from John is all about light and darkness. In fact, right off the bat Jesus tells his disciples that as long as he is in the world, he is the light of the world.

The disciples and Jesus pass by a man who is blind, and who has been that way since the time of his birth. Quickly they jump to the normal conclusion of Jews living at that time, that either the man or his parents must have sinned. In fact, if they were to focus on particular Old Testament texts, they might have asked if it was his grandparents or his great grandparents.

As Jesus tends to do, he derails their erroneous train of thought. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.” On its surface that statement is more than a little disturbing. We might interpret it to mean that God sends us suffering so that some great sign or work could be demonstrated through us.

Sometimes that is so. There have been and are some amazing examples. Think the many thousands of Christian martyrs who have given their lives when the easy thing to do would be to recant or give in under the threat of death or torture. We have excellent historical evidence that in the first three hundred years of the Christian church, those who were martyred for their faithfulness drew many others to begin to ask about this Jesus for whom they died.

But not all suffering happens so that God can be glorified. In fact, there are several possible reasons that we can propose for various instances of suffering. And there is some, perhaps much, suffering for which we simply cannot devise an explanation. Then the question becomes, can we, do we trust that God is with us or others even in the agony of that suffering? No time to deal in any depth with that question today, but it is important to realize that the question of the “why” of suffering is not completely resolved by Jesus’ answer to this blind man.

Jesus makes some mud from his saliva and common dirt, and spreads the mud on the man’s eyes. After the man goes to wash in a nearby pool, he is suddenly able to see: another one of what John likes to call the “signs” of Jesus, what we would call a miracle. The problem is that he performs this sign on the sabbath day of the Jews. Healing is work, according to the scribes and Pharisees, and work is forbidden on the sabbath. So, as in many places in the gospels, Jesus is immediately in trouble.

The Pharisees question the man, the man’s parents, and then the man once again in this long passage. They want to know what happened, and they want to know if they have evidence to even further increase their persecution of Jesus, for by this time in John’s narrative the Jewish authorities already have it in for him.

In fact, they have issued a directive that anyone who confesses Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah, the Holy One sent by God, is to be cast out of her synagogue. Essentially, she would be cut off from her family of faith and very possibly her birth family as well. Note that the man’s parents are very careful not to offend the authorities, for this very reason.

When the man is questioned by the authorities for the second time, he defends Jesus, telling them that he must be from God because of the sign he has done through this man. And they cast him out of his synagogue.

Jesus finds the man and asks him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man replies by asking who he is. Jesus says, “You have seen him, and the one speaking to you is he.” The man exclaims, “Lord, I believe,” and he falls down before Jesus and worships him. Jesus tells the man, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.”

Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

Another one of those strange Jesus sayings in John’s gospel. But perhaps not too difficult to comprehend.

The problem with the Pharisees (or at least most of them) is that they could not see that the Messiah, the Anointed One, for whom they had been waiting for so many

generations was now finally present and with them. He didn't lead a great army of Jews in a triumphant campaign against the Romans. There obviously wasn't a new period of peace and prosperity for their people, as Isaiah and others had prophesied. He didn't look like the kind of Messiah they were expecting, so he was rejected and persecuted.

This is the kind of blindness Jesus speaks of in these closing verses. The Pharisees claim that they see, that they comprehend, that they know what the Christ will be like, but they actually miss him altogether. So they are, in reality, blind.

The warning to us is fairly clear: we also have to be wary of spiritual blindness. We know that Jesus from Nazareth, born around the year 6 BC, was and is the Messiah. Our blindness is rather the error of trying to remake him into what we want him to be.

During this Season of Lent we remember that he is a Messiah who washes the feet of his disciples and tells us that we are to do the same for others, that is to serve in humility. We remember that he is a Messiah who willingly gives his life on a despicable instrument of Roman torture, so that all of us might have life, and have it abundantly. He is the Anointed One who calls us to love others as he loves us, and that means in word and deed.

The blindness of the Pharisees was their inability to see that this peasant from Galilee is the one for whom they have been waiting. Our blindness is the inability to see him for who he really is, and to grasp the kind of disciples we are called to be.

In the opening verses of the passage, Jesus tells his disciples that as long as he is in the world, he is the light of the world. Remember the prologue to John's gospel? John writes, “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” When we read John from end to end, I am convinced that he was not only the light of the world while he was in it, but he has been the light of the world from the time of its creation, remains so to this day, and always will be.

It is in and through Jesus that we are able to see. If we try to see the world or others without him, our vision is cloudy and perhaps even utterly dark. Christ and only Christ allows us to see clearly, to see the world and to see others as dearly loved creations of God. He is the light of the world.