

## **“Come and See - with Eyes Opened by Love”**

February 11, 2018

Scripture Lesson: John 9: 1-41

### Prayer of Illumination:

God of Life, may the words of my mouth,  
and the meditations of all our minds and hearts,  
lead us to deeper understanding of you,  
and the love you call us to live. Amen.

Last Friday night, Luke and I were at the Ottawa 67's hockey game and we sat in our usual area on seats. As the seats filled in, a family of four came and sat down - two of them beside us and two of them in the two seats behind. One of the daughters in the family was blind and she was seated behind us and so it was interesting to hear her perspective on being at a hockey game.

I am assuming it was her father who was sitting beside her and he had lots of questions to answer. What is a cross-checking penalty? What is a hooking penalty? He did a great job of describing and explaining the rules and what had happened on the ice to assess such penalties.

At one point, she asked, “Why was that whistle longer than all the others?” He father struggled to understand what she was saying. It was a whistle to stop play. But why was it longer than the others?

It struck me that when you are watching the game with your ears, than you notice different things. I don't imagine any of us who were watching with our eyes noticed the different lengths of the whistles. There were a couple of other times when she was inquisitive about sounds in the building - noises her father hadn't even heard.

I wish now that I had engaged the family in conversation, because even through the overhearing I experienced the hockey game in a refreshing way.

I admit that even though it was a Friday night - 10 days ago - I did bring to mind this sermon and this story that we heard today about the man born blind. It is an occupational reality that even at a hockey game, I can find myself sermonizing!

And as I thought it, I can't even imagine - I can hardly comprehend how - someone would think - let alone ask - who sinned - the daughter or her parents - who caused her to be blind. That would be at least a 2 minutes penalty for ....

Yet, that was a dominant idea at the time of Jesus, the man born blind was being cursed by God and so someone's sins were responsible. Jesus dismisses the argument and yet the Pharisees just won't let it go.... 2 more minutes for piling on ....

Today, we complete the Epiphany season and we have been moving our way through the gospel

of John. Five weeks ago, we heard the would-be disciple Nathaneal wonder if anything good could out of Nazareth - reflecting a bias of his time - and yet he responded to the invitation to Come and See and so through these other gospel of John stories we have seen various encounters of Jesus and how new revelation and insight have enabled others to see and to follow. And so it is appropriate today that the metaphor of sight comes into play in at various levels today as this man born blind comes to see.

While we may have questions about how this man came to see - the author of John doesn't worry about how this "miracle" came to be - he is more concerned with the challenging of the assumptions of the day and how Jesus offers fresh and new revelations of the Holy.

Perhaps the most important part of this story is the final verses where Jesus talks about spiritual blindness and the Pharisees say, "Who us?" Yes, gentlemen - 2 minutes for spiritual blindness!

As this Epiphany season has been unfolding, I have also been reflecting on the words of Brian McLaren in his book, The Great Spiritual Migration. He speaks of how the people of God have been a people on the move and how it is time for a great spiritual migration in our time and context. He is primarily writing to an American audience, and the American Christian context is a bit different than in Canada, but there is enough that still applies. He speaks of three migrations that he sees and I have talked about the Spiritual and Missional migrations that he suggests over the past two weeks.

The third migration he encourages is theological - rejecting the image of God as a violent Supreme being and embracing instead the renewing Spirit at work in our world.

We know that there is violence offered in the name of God. There is a lot of killing justified by religious doctrine and convictions. And the violence isn't always physical - but also in attitudes and thought. Christianity lives with the reality of a superiority complex that has led to some pretty horrific actions and practices.

Brian McLaren uses the image that we have carried in our back pocket this theological card of justifying hatred, violence because we have an image of God as one who controls, judges and punishes. While we speak of love as the primary quality of God, there is still this violent strand that can trump love whenever we need it too. Those are some pretty harsh and condemning words, but also words that have rings of truth as we know our history.

Who sinned this man or his parents? There is a disturbing judgement to that question that tends to always justify our pre-judgements and biases and creates barriers and walls that limit respect, dignity and love.

I have seen a quote on Face book a few times over the past few months that says, "If your religion requires you to hate someone, you need a new religion." If your religion encourages you to hate to someone, you need a new religion.

We know that there are realities in our world that produce painful memories and resentments. We know that there are human emotions and insecurities that create broken relationships and wounded perspectives - but if we find justification for our limits in our understanding of God, than we have more work to do on our understanding of the Holy.

We carry within and among us a spiritual blindness that sometimes affects how we view the world, one another and ourselves. And so we are invited to come and see and to have our eyes opened by Love.

As our global connections and awareness expand, so can our understanding of the meaning of God's love. We are invited to stretch the norms of our human functioning so that we can see with our ears and hear with our eyes, and embrace the gift and promise of the unconditional love of God.

There is much that we need to sift through to embrace that radical gift of love that is God. God is the energy of love in our world and we are challenged to love God with all our heart our mind, strength and soul and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. It's that simple it's that complex

That's a daunting task - but the Spirit is at work equipping us with the courage, the compassion, the dignity and worth to join the company of learners and followers of the one who proclaimed Love. So the invitation of Jesus, is offered forever and anew - Come and See - Come and Follow Me.