

May 13, 2013    The Mystery Pt. 2    John 9:13-34

Last week we looked at the first 12 verses of John chapter 9. Jesus and the disciples are walking. As their journey takes them closer to a village Jesus and the 12 see a man who is begging for money. He is blind. In fact he was blind from the time he was born. The disciples ask a deep question. Who sinned? Was it this man as an unborn infant in the womb? Or was it his parents? In other words their assumption is (a common strain of Jewish thinking at the time) that bad things happen to good people (a better phrase is ordinary people) because they have committed sin, and God is judging them for their sinfulness.

Jesus blows their minds when he insists this blindness is not about sinfulness at all. Jesus says, 'this man was born blind, that the work of God might be displayed in his life.' (John 9:3). And without further comment Jesus spits on the dust of the road, mixes some mud, and puts it on the eyes of the blind man. He instructs the man to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. The man returned from this exercise, able to see.

Immediately there was controversy. His neighbours and friends asked the question, "Is not this the man who used to sit by the road and beg?" They knew he had been blind. They had observed him begging at the road side. Some said, 'He's the one!' Some said, 'He just looks like that man.' As for the man himself, he insisted, he is the one who was born blind and that now he can see. People ask the real question.

What happened? The man who has been healed says it was Jesus! He shares the details. And when they ask where is this man named Jesus, the healed blind man confesses he has no idea. Jesus has continued down the road on which they met. John shares the story because he witnessed all of these details. I shared the insight that these healing miracles are not things we understand, as if we could explain or grasp every step of what occurred. They are miracles precisely because they face us with an occurrence that focuses our faith in God in Jesus. And because such events are more about faith than understanding...there is a mysterious quality to them.

We cannot dissect God's grace. He confronts us in deeds of love and power and we wind up making a choice. Well....that is just the beginning of the story. The crowd of neighbours and friends brought the man who was blind to the Pharisees, to the experts on Old Testament teaching. Assuming nothing, the Pharisees ask the man who was born blind to tell the story again. He does. "Jesus put mud on my eyes, I washed, and now I can see." But there is another detail, one which is very important to the Pharisees. It is a Saturday, the Sabbath. The first observation made by the Pharisees is this: "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." (John 9:16). There is more controversy. There is divided opinion. Some ask how a sinful person could do such miraculous signs? The question that divides opinion is, "Is Jesus a faithful man, or is he a careless sinner?"

The Pharisees turn to the man that was born blind. “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” Here is the mysterious quality of miracles. The healed man’s convictions cannot be silenced. He replies to the question asked, “He is a prophet.” Not just a good man, but a man whom God has called to service and on whom God has poured out power. A unique servant of God.

In response to that, the Pharisees return to the question that began the controversy. Is this the man who was born blind and begging by the side of the road for years? In the midst of that development John reveals something about himself and the other 11 disciples and some in the crowd who had been following them and Jesus. He speaks here of the Pharisees as the “Jews”. When John is writing this down he is aware that something has happened to himself and the other 11. Born as sons of Israel, Jews, they have become something else. Their self identity has changed. It now reflects their bond with Jesus. And John saw this in the man who had been born blind and who was healed by our Lord. It is as though John is revealing whatever we are, (Christians, disciples of Jesus, followers of the way) we are not like the Pharisees. They are the “Jews”. We are not like them. It is significant, that John would see so clearly, this mysterious reality that Jesus changes the way we perceive ourselves.

The parents of the man who was born blind are called. And yes this is suddenly a formal proceeding, if not like a

trial, certainly like a “hearing”. Witnesses are being called. Statements are being taken. Someone is keeping notes on the proceedings. And so is John, the disciple of Jesus. Three things are asked of the parents of the healed man. Is he your son? Yes. Is he the one you say was born blind? Yes. How is it that he can now see? Explain it to us. The parents answer with certainty that he is their son. They answer with certainty that he was born blind. They like he have lived with this all of his earthly days! As to how he came to be able to see...they do not know. They were not present. They do not understand. And they are afraid of the Pharisees. It is a known fact that they have decided already, anyone who says Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, will be expelled from their local synagogue. Consequences. Expulsion from the worshipping community.

His parents make a simple plea. Ask him. He is of age. Ask him...not us! They are afraid. They feel threatened. They are not about to disown their son. But they are trying to be very careful. And they have reason to be concerned.

The Pharisees call the man who was born blind to answer more questions. But their request has changed. It is a demand. “Give glory to God,” they said, “We know this man (Jesus) is a sinner.” Change sides, or else. Change your story, or else. There is no velvet glove on the hand of authority...it is an unveiled threat. The man born blind is emotional. He is also getting angry. He is being treated as though he had done something wrong. And besides...Jesus healed his blindness. He

makes one unequivocal statement. “ One thing I do know. I was blind and now I see.” Order dissolves. They insult him. They accuse him of being a disciple of Jesus.

Something mysterious happens. The man born blind becomes calm. He collects his thoughts and he makes a statement. He makes 4 statements to this “hearing.” First. You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. He is accusing them of hypocrisy, saying they serve God but not recognizing His power, His grace, His miracle. Second. We know God does not listen to sinners. In other words Jesus is not a sinner. Third. He listens to the Godly man who does HIS will...someone like Jesus. Fourth. Nobody has ever heard of the opening of the eyes of a man born blind....TA-DA!!! Behold the mysterious hand of God.

That does it John tells us. They condemn the man who has been healed as a sinner and they expel him from the local synagogue. He is rather eloquent, this healed blind man. And in the mystery of the moment he sounds like a disciple of Jesus. The grace of God changes us. It changed him. Notice this. It is important. There is a price to be paid for receiving and accepting the saving grace of God. The martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it “the cost of discipleship.”

That is how this second chapter of the story ends. Next week chapter three.

Let us pray

Sometimes on the mount, where the sun shines so bright, God leads His dear children along. Sometimes in the valley, in darkness of night, God leads His dear children along.

Some through the waters, some through the flood,  
Some through the fire, but all through the blood,  
Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,  
In the night season and all the day long.

Dear Lord, in the midst of our circumstances when we cannot understand what is happening or why it is happening, or what the fruit of those circumstances will be, grant that we might have the faith to say, this I know: I am not here by chance, and I am not here alone. Make your grace sufficient for the day, and the night, and the morning that will follow. Amen