

⚔ Rampant Blindness+

Everyone employs selective sight. At all times, when we are awake and even at times when we are asleep, our brain receives impulses with sensory data from all five senses. Since you sat down, your brain has probably stopped consciously focusing on the feel of the pew or choir chair, unless you are physically uncomfortable. Most are probably not thinking about the temperature of the room, although you probably did at one point this morning. Our brains would go crazy if they had to process every piece of data that our bodies sensed.

While we think we are seeing everything, we continue to employ selective sight. This morning, many have probably noticed who is not here or who is sitting on a different pew; some even notice who is sitting with whom. Some may even wonder what it means that so-and-so is sitting with a particular person. Selective sight. When a person exhibits interest in a specific kind of car, it seems that, all of a sudden, these particular models are everywhere. They were there before, but you never noticed them.

Selective sight also includes what we do not see. While our eyes can see, if physically possible, we still decide what we *want* to see. Selective sight also produces rampant blindness.

The ninth chapter of John plays like a drama; the Apostle John was a wonderful story-teller who seemed to enjoy painting mental pictures for his listeners and readers. The entire chapter can be divided into six scenes, all of which reference blindness.

While I did not read the entire chapter this morning, I would like for us to look at each scene and briefly examine the rampant blindness.

Scene 1 (1-7): Jesus *saw* a man blind from birth; I think it is significant that John recorded that Jesus *saw* a man. The disciples wanted to discuss the theology of his sickness; Jesus wanted to address the blindness. Jesus referenced darkness and light. The blind man did not ask to be healed. Jesus saw the blind man, then spit into some dirt, placed the mud on the blind eyes and told him to go wash in the pool called Sent, and the man could see for the first time in his life.

Scene 2 (v. 8-12): The blind man went back to where he was familiar, back in his own neighborhood. The walk from the pool called Sent back to the area where he grew up was more than enlightening; he finally could see where he had been living . . . and the people with whom he had been neighbors. His friends and neighbors appeared to be disturbed that he was no longer blind. They were *blind* to his good fortune. All they could do was quarrel. "Isn't this the guy who was always blind, who begged regularly from us?" "No, it's not the same guy." "Yes it is the same guy." Rather than celebrating his vision, the locals grumbled.

Scene 3 (v. 13-17): So great was their discontent, that they dragged the blind man to the Pharisees, the ones who determined what was right and wrong, the ones who construed the Law into legalistic traditions that common people could not uphold. Their emphasis on the exterior trumped what was inside a person. They were also blinded to the healing. All they could see was what they considered to be a transgression against their understanding of the Sabbath. While they, as religious leaders, should have been celebrating the sight to a person who had never seen the blueness of the sky or the colors of a rainbow, instead they fixated on what could upset their system. For them, this was not the way things were to be done; someone made mud by spitting into some dirt, which to them, constituted work, and no one was allowed to work on the Sabbath.

Scene 4 (v. 18-23): The Pharisees, still blinded to the miracle of opening the eyes of the man born blind, decided to quiz the man's parents. Pharisees had made it distinctly clear that anyone who followed Jesus would be excommunicated from the local synagogue. Blinded by the fear of being ostracized, the parents requested that they be excused from the witch-hunt; today, they might reply, "I plead the fifth amendment. I do not want to say anything which might incriminate me. Please do not ask us to be involved. While he is our son, he is old enough to speak for himself; we raised him to be a competent adult, so just ask him."

Scene 5 (v. 24-34): Again, the Pharisees interrogated the healed man. Emotion overruled reason, and an argument ensued. The healed man appealed to his experience (ōI was once blind, but now I seeö), and to reason (ōIf I have been healed, the person had to be of Godö). Now the Pharisees were faced with a double bind: either they had to accept the fact that the man was healed, which would include an affirmation that the healer was of God, or they could cling to their narrow understanding of the Sabbath observance while rejecting the healing and the healer. Knowing how the Pharisees operated, I am not surprised that they deliberately chose familiarity of what they understood over what they could not control in the present. As a result, the healed man was excommunicated. The man born blind had not asked Jesus to heal him, yet Jesus intentionally healed him on the Sabbath to make a point. In the final analysis, the Pharisees were threatened more by Jesus than by the healed man.

Scene six (v. 35-41): Jesus returned. After the healing, Jesus had exited, but the drama had heightened. Perhaps reports of religious conflicts traveled fast in those days; that certainly can be said about today. After Jesus heard about the trouble which the healed man had experienced, Jesus searched for him until he found him. Jesus asked him, ōDo you believe in the Son of Man?ö

The healed man said, ōWho is he? Tell me. If I knew, then I could believe in him.ö After all which he had experienced, after gaining sight, after interrogation by the religious elite, after non-support from family, after excommunication from the synagogue, the man was still blind to the source of his good fortune; he still did not know who had saved him from a life of darkness.

Jesus said, ōYou're looking at him. It's me.ö

Just as the water from the pool called Sent had washed away his blindness, the healed man now had opportunity to reverse his spiritual blindness and embrace the One who truly allowed him to see. The healed man confessed his faith in Jesus, and his sins were washed away.

Some eavesdropping Pharisees overheard this conversation and inquired if Jesus considered them to be blind. He responded, ōBecause you think you have arrived, because you consider yourselves all-seeing, because you think your vision is faultless, you truly don't get it. You really are blind.ö

When I read the Bible, I try to find my name, to see how the passage intersects with my story. Did you identify with anyone described in the drama of John 9? These six scenes highlight the rampant blindness of any society. Some people physically have visual impairments. Like the healed man's friends and neighbors in Scene Two, some cannot celebrate with another person. Some are blinded by jealousy or envy. Others cannot see something good that happens to someone and choose instead to denigrate another in order to elevate themselves.

Others are like the Pharisees, who choose their own superiority over the experience and expression of another, thus becoming unreasonable in accepting another's faith expression when it is different. I hear of too many people who do not enjoy the support of their family simply because they may lose face in the community because of a child's personal choice. Choosing privilege over standing up for what is right indicates a lack of vision and integrity. Those who choose to follow the example of Jesus may be shunned even by those who claim to be his followers. Spiritual blindness is manifested in a multitude of ways.

Jesus came to open the eyes of the blind, and all of us cannot see as well as Jesus wants us to see. During this Lenten Season, what can you do to enlarge your vision of the Savior? How can you and I see what Christ wants us to see? O God, save us from the darkness we choose, and help our rampant blindness.