

"There are none so blind as those who will not see," according to an old proverb. The Random House Dictionary of popular proverbs and sayings traces it back at least as far as the 16th c. England. It is found much later in Jonathan Swift's "Polite Conversations" written in 1738, and 25 years before that on this side of the Atlantic in the 'Works of Thomas Chalkley'. More significant to our Bible story this morning, "There are none so blind as those who will not see" conveys the thought of Jeremiah 5:21 *'Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not'*. Jesus was doubtless familiar with the warning of the Old Testament prophet. At the end of chapter 9 of John, Jesus observes that those who refuse to see the truth before them are worse than someone physically blind, because they are making a choice about not seeing.

In John's gospel, the wondrous works that Jesus performs are not miracles, but signs. Signs pointing to the Glory of God. The healing of the man born blind is one of these signs. In this story, in addition to the main theme of Jesus bringing healing, and the Pharisees' objections to the sign Jesus has performed, there is a subtheme asking the question of "Who is to blame?" In the 1st c. AD worldview, illness and injury were attributed to sin. That is why the questions were asked, Why was the man blind? Had he sinned? Was it inherited sin from his father? Jesus declares that these are the wrong questions, based on wrong assumptions. The man's blindness wasn't caused by sin, but the blindness was now an opportunity for God's glory to be revealed.

Presbyterian minister R. Mark Davis, who examines the New Testament Greek for the lectionary gospel passages, comments on the curiously constructed sentence that is verse 3, and thinks that it is cut in half, and really belongs with the end of verse 4. It all depends on where you put the period, but in the biblical Greek, there wasn't any punctuation.

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but in order that the works of God may be made apparent in him." is a common way of translating, with some adding "but this happened in order that the works of God" to smooth it out. This makes blindness the subject of the sentence. But verse 3 and part of verse 4 are actually one sentence. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned. But in order that the works of God may be made apparent in him, it is necessary for us to work the works of the one having sent me while it is day." This translation shifts the subject from the man's blindness and who is to blame to Jesus' need to work while there is light – or, before the blindness of night rests on everyone and there is no more opportunity to work.

Eugene Peterson's *the Message*, which is more of a paraphrase than an exact translation, also understands the subject to be Jesus' need to work while there is light:

3-5 Jesus said, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world's Light."

The disciples who originally heard Jesus' teaching, the audience who has read or heard John's gospel since it was written, are all told that when they come across sickness or affliction, not to look for who to blame, but to focus on what God does, and to work for God as long as the work day lasts, as long as it is light.

God's work is healing, restoration, wholeness. So, Jesus heals the man born blind. For those wanting an instantaneous remission of blindness on the spot, Jesus is not a fan of instant gratification. The medicinal salve Jesus uses to anoint the man's eyes is a mixture of dirt and saliva. And then Jesus sends the man off to wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam. I am assuming that someone had to lead the man there, since he was still blind until he got to the Pool and washed his eyes. Since the Covid Pandemic made us aware of the importance of washing our hands to deter the spread of germs, I am struck that Jesus has the blind man wash up in order to complete the healing. It's like other healings when Jesus says, "Be clean!"

You might remember from English classes learning that a good story has to have conflict. The day of the week that the man received his sight happened to be the Sabbath, and since no work was allowed on the Jewish Sabbath, not even good work, the Pharisees objected. They questioned not only the man who used to be blind, but his parents. I love how his parents replied to the religious authorities – yeah, this is our son, and yeah, he was born blind, but how he can now see, we haven't a clue. He's a grown-up, go ask him! The parents try so hard not to get in trouble with the Pharisee that they sound like politicians, dodging the questions. Their son is more forthright. The man healed from blindness originally says that the guy who healed him must be a prophet. When the Pharisees come back again, wanting him to toe the party line and discredit Jesus, the man stands his ground – All I know is that once I was blind, but now I see. If this man didn't come from God, he wouldn't have been able to heal me.

At this point the Pharisees threw him out. Biblical scholars believe that John's gospel was written during the 90s or later, after the Jewish Council of Jamnia. After that point, there was a definite split between Jews and Jewish Christians. In fact, Jews following the Nazarene, Jesus of Nazareth, were thrown out of synagogues. Those who believed in the Son of Man, Jesus the Messiah, were no longer welcome to worship with other Jews. But for John's gospel, the ones

who saw Jesus as the Messiah were the ones seeing clearly, as contrasted with the traditional Pharisees, who clung to their blindness.

After the man whose sight was restored has been thrown out, he doesn't go seeking the man who healed him, but rather Jesus comes seeking him. Jesus asks, Do you believe in the Son of Man? And the man answers, Who is he, that I may believe? Then Jesus reveals himself – it's me, standing right in front of you. A strict translation from the NT Greek says, "You have seen him, and the one who speaks to you is he." Eugene Peterson's *The Message* translates it as, "You're looking right at him. Don't you recognize my voice?" The man born blind had never seen Jesus before in the flesh, because he was still blind when Jesus sent him off to the Pool of Siloam to wash. Now he proclaims, "I believe" and bows before him.

John's gospel is full of profound philosophical proclamations, and this is where it comes in Chapter 9: **And Jesus said, "Into judgment I came into this world, in order that the ones who do not see may see and the ones who do see may become blind ones."** Or, in the fancier way Petersen translates in *The Message*: ³⁹ Jesus then said, "I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind."

So, what do we get out of this Bible story this morning?

- 1) Jesus sees our infirmities and we find healing when we see Jesus.
- 2) We don't get sick because we have sinned or someone else has, we need to quit blaming ourselves or blaming the sick person.
- 3) The man's eyes were opened to see physically, but Jesus makes a point at the end of the story that the man needs to have his eyes open to see spiritually as well. And he does, recognizing Jesus as the Son of Man, and bowing to him.

Why is it that some people can't see the truth? That some people can't see what is really going on? It has to do with one's worldview, how the constructions in your mind shape what it is you see. Because your view of the truth is based on your internal beliefs, there is resistance to changing your views, even when presented with verifiable facts – all because of the internal understanding of how things are.

When the Covid Pandemic hit 6 years ago, most of the American population sheltered in place, washing their hands and practicing social distancing. But there were still parties in places like New Orleans, and on the Florida beaches because people either believed younger adults weren't at risk like the elderly, or mistakenly thought that the Covid-19 wasn't any worse than the flu. Even

today there are segments of the American population who continue to resent the period of time when masking was enforced, or when Covid vaccinations were required for the military and other groups. There are still social media posts with persons bragging "I never got the jab and I never caught Covid." Anti-vax sentiments are now so widespread that way too many families don't vaccinate their children against measles... and we now have outbreaks in the US. Why are they so blind? Why can't they see the truth?

There is a psychological principle called "the persistence of discredited beliefs". Basically, once a person has been made to believe something, they cannot be made to **fully** disbelieve it - even when shown irrefutable evidence. This is why the effects of brainwashing are so severe and last so long. Our brains get into ruts. We cling to the way we used to see things because our whole worldview depends on continuing to see things the same old way. We see things we want to see and are blind to other things that might upset our point of view. Belief perseverance is a form of confirmation bias.

There really are "none so blind as those who will not see." And Jesus distinguishes between those who **can't** see - who aren't physically able, and those who **won't** see - those who choose not to see. "If you were really blind, you would be blameless," Jesus tells the Pharisees, "but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure." Who's to blame for blindness? Not the sick, not the afflicted, not those impaired from birth or stricken in life. But those who are blind to the truth? Those who are blind to facts, to reality? They are accountable for their choice to remain in darkness rather than enter into the light.

Let us, like Jesus, be moved with compassion to seek healing for all who are sick and physically impaired. Let us, like Jesus, hold those who choose to be blind to truth accountable, and confront the conveyors of persistent, discredited beliefs. Amen.