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RICHARDSON

## “Choosing to See the Light”

John 9: 1-41

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Think of a time when you’ve received really great news- news that was so great that you just had to share it with someone. When Jay and I got engaged last August, we immediately called my parents with our news, wanting to invite them to share in our joy. Over the next few days, we continued to share our news and to bask in the love and joy from our friends, our family, and our communities. I’ll never forget sharing that joy with y’all from the pulpit the following Sunday morning.

When you have news so great, you want to share it with those around you. But imagine, if those around you, don’t find your news so great. What if you were sharing something so great, expecting reactions of celebration or congratulations, and all you got were interrogative, skeptical questions and harsh judgement? The man we meet in this morning’s story shared some life-altering news with his community, and those interrogative, skeptical questions and harsh judgements were exactly what he received in response.

Jesus was walking and saw a man on the side of the road who was blind. The first reaction Jesus’ disciples had when they saw this man was to question the nature of the man’s character- the ways he or his parents had sinned that could have perhaps explained why the man was born blind. But Jesus’ initial reaction to the man was to see him and then to spit on the ground, make some mud, spread it on the man’s eyes, and then gift the man with sight.

Imagine if you were this man, seeing the world with your eyes for the first time. He shared his new gift with his community, and rather than sharing in his joy, his neighbors questioned him. Remembering him not as one who sees, but as one who sits by the road and begs, neighbors started asking, “Is this really him?” Rather than listening to the person standing in front of them, they determined that it wasn’t him, but someone like him, despite how many times he looked in their eyes and said “Yes! It’s me! It’s really me.”

His neighbors don’t take him at his word. They didn’t see him, nor did they listen to him. They asked more questions, over and over again- “How did this happen?” “Who did this to you?” “Where is that healer?” At any point so far, they could have chosen to celebrate with the man and his good news. But they didn’t.

And then they took him to the Pharisees, the religious authorities. And they didn’t share in his good news either. They asked him how he got his sight, why he got his sight, who gave him his sight. They even call upon the man’s parents, and ask them more questions, too.





It's an endless circle of more and more questions, and they refuse to let the man's answers take them any closer to some sort of clarity. Their relentless asking of questions leave no space for them to hear or listen for answers. Question after question feeding into their frustration, taking them further and further away from the truth of the situation: that a man who was blind can now see, that Jesus had done something miraculous in their midst.

As much as I don't want to admit it, I think I've found myself in the company of these questioning Pharisees this week. I have paid closer attention to the news this week than I have at any other point in my life- listening to it on my phone while I'm doing dishes, turning on the Today Show first thing when I wake up, refreshing news websites on my computer over and over again. Normally I start my day with coffee and scripture study- but I haven't been able to focus on God's Word this week. I haven't been able to even give God's peace a chance to rest on me. I haven't been able to experience God as shepherd or restorer or any of the other ways the Psalmist portrays God in the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm. I've been so caught up in asking questions of why and trying to understand this pandemic and our community's responses to it.

Asking "why" is exactly what the man who received his sight didn't do. Instead he lived into the truth of what Jesus said to him when they met. This man lived into answering his heart's questions of "How is the work of God revealed in me and around me?" and "How can I be a part of sharing Christ's light with the world?"

And as he did that, he gradually lived into the reality of his identity: that he's a beloved child of God, never forgotten by the One who created him and wants only goodness for him, and that he is living proof that God can make something beautiful, even with spit-made mud from the ground.

Rather than relentlessly asking "why," I'd rather be in this man's company right now, with eyes wide open for the ways God is making something beautiful from the dirt, looking for how God might be inviting me to help make these dark days a little lighter with Christ's love, especially for those whom now is an especially dark time. This doesn't mean that I am going to ignore the dirt and the darkness, but that I will seek the beauty and the light that I believe God is and will continue to bring forth. I'll rejoice in opportunities to read novels and spend extra time in my home. I'll tear up when I hear of church members calling other members or sharing extra produce with them. I'll listen to choirs making music via videoconference or across balconies. I'll follow the man in the story, choosing to believe in the midst of doubt, and together we'll follow Christ's light all the way to the end of the tunnel, when this darkness is no more.

Earlier this week, I came across a poem by Kitty O'Meara, offering one way we might experience the beauty of the next few weeks, instead of asking "why" again and again. The internet is proclaiming O'Meara the poet laureate of the pandemic, after her poem went viral this week. O'Meara lives in Wisconsin, with her husband, and their five rescue dogs. While practicing social distancing this past week, she decided to pick up an old hobby: writing. She then wrote this poem, and posted it on her blog- her first post in years.



When her poem went viral this week, she saw such a response as encouragement to keep writing. She said, “It’s a good reminder that whatever your gift is, and however small it is, keep using it.”<sup>1</sup>

Let’s choose to hear how words as an invitation to each of us to keep using our gifts, and to believe that God is making something beautiful, even in the midst of darkness. Her poem goes like this:

And the people stayed home.  
And read books, and listened, and rested,  
and exercised, and made art, and played games,  
and learned new ways of being,  
and were still.  
And listened more deeply.  
Some meditated, some prayed, some danced.  
Some met their shadows.  
And the people began to think differently.  
And the people healed.  
And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and  
heartless ways,  
the earth began to heal.  
And when the danger passed,  
and the people joined together again,  
they grieved their losses,  
and made new choices,  
and dreamed new images,  
and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully,  
as they had been healed.

Friends, may it be so.  
Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> This quote and O’Meara’s poem can be found at <https://www.oprahmag.com/entertainment/a31747557/and-the-people-stayed-home-poem-kitty-omeara-interview/>