



March 2, 2008

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Verboom

John 9:1-41

“A Hullabaloo Over Healing”

Today’s Scripture unfolds as a drama, with specific characters and scene changes. Let’s enter the drama, picturing the scenes as they occur.

Scene one is introductory. Jesus and his disciples are traveling along the road. They see a man who has been blind since birth. The disciples want to get involved in a theological discussion of the man’s problem: “Why is he like this? Did he sin? Was it his parents’ sin that brought his suffering upon him?” Jesus will have none of this: “None of those questions have any bearing on anything,” he says, and rather than offering an explanation, he offers healing.

“We’re not going to discuss why he is the way he is,” Jesus seems to be saying. “We’re going to draw on the power and mercy of God to heal what is wrong with him. It doesn’t matter why or how he got this way. What matters is that we do what is needed to end his suffering.” Using a procedure similar to those used by other healers in his day, Jesus restores the man’s sight.

Right here, in the first scene, Jesus teaches a profound lesson. We are easily entangled in “why”s and “wherefore”s when facing a problem. We look for reasons and blame to explain a predicament. That was not the way of Jesus. He didn’t dredge around in the past, or lay blame. He brought healing. He showed mercy. He acted with compassion. And he expects us to follow his example.

Jesus disappears at the end of Scene one, along with the disciples. And life for the formerly blind man is no picnic during Jesus’ absence. In fact, we could understand it if he ended up saying, “Gee, I never asked to be healed. This guy just

comes up to me and WHAM! I can see! It was great at first, but if this is what it means to be blessed by God, maybe I could forego some of God's favor!" This Scripture illustrates a truth: God's favor does not remove us from the line of fire, but actually often does the opposite- we find ourselves in the thick of the battle. Let's consider what happened to the healed man in the four scenes following Jesus' disappearance.

Scene two: The man finds himself back in his old neighborhood. He'd like to go home again, but it turns out he can't. Friends and neighbors are disturbed that he's no longer blind. There is no joy, no celebration, no "welcome home", only questions and doubts. His insistence that he's still the same person gets a doubtful response. They had all known him as a man who stumbled, lived in poverty and depended on others. These characteristics defined who he was. What are they to do with this man who now walks with confidence and independence? They bombard him with questions: "Who did it? How? Where? When? Where is the healer now?" Arguments break out among those who think he might be the blind man healed, and those who think he's an imposter.

Scene three: The townspeople drag the healed man off to the religious leaders. These men are interested in all reported miracles, especially ones worked by unauthorized persons and in violation of the law. This particular healing presents a serious violation: it was accomplished on the Sabbath when the law holds that absolutely no work can be done. Faithful Jews were required to REST on Sabbath, and healing wasn't resting.

The situation poses a major problem to the religious leaders. If the man really was healed, then the healer had to be an agent of God's presence and power. But if the healing was done on the Sabbath, the healer was acting in opposition to God and his laws. The easiest conclusion was to doubt the healing: "Are you sure you can see? Were you really blind?" The man insists that he was truly healed, and he calls Jesus a prophet of God.

It was embarrassing to have a divinely appointed healer breaking the laws of the Sabbath. It challenged all that was held sacred to the leaders. So,

Scene four begins with the parents of the blind man being hauled in for questioning. They are grilled by the authorities. "Yes, he is our son. Yes, he was born blind. No, we don't know what happened. No, we do not know who did it." Whatever joy they may have felt is drowned in fear. Afraid of being expelled from the synagogue, afraid of social disgrace, afraid of being punished through their association with the events, they ask not to be involved. If this is what it means to be blessed by God, thanks, but no thanks!

Scene five is a repeat of scene three. The authorities light into the healed man, this time with more intensity. Pressure builds and tempers flare. The religious leaders hear his testimony: “I was blind; now I see.” They can no longer refute the evidence that a healing did take place. So they try to get the man to denounce Jesus as a sinner. But common sense and logic won’t let him do it. Jesus MUST be of God to have the power to heal! Anger and frustration prevail; the man is denounced as a sinner along with Jesus, and excommunicated from his faith.

Scene six opens with the healed man thrown out of the synagogue. His old friends have abandoned him, his parents reject him, and he’s not welcome in his house of worship. This is blessing?? But wait---- in this, the final scene, Jesus returns. Jesus returns with vindication for the suffering man. He receives Jesus as his Savior, and professes his trust in him. Jesus judges his oppressors. “You,” he says, “see.” “They,” he says, “do not.”

This healing teaches us that life is blindness without Christ. Darkness surrounds those who, without God’s Spirit, claim to see.

We also learn that Christ’s transformation and healing may put us at odds with the world. But Christ will be present with us and defend us again and again. Some of God’s blessings put us in the midst of turmoil and conflict. But we can’t deny that God has entered our lives. Our plain common sense and logic tell us that Jesus is from God; he is OF God. His ways are God’s ways-- even when they fly in the face of human understandings about right and wrong, lawful and unlawful.

We may feel like this man sometimes—adrift in a difficult world all alone. But Christ comes back. He always comes back. He never truly leaves us alone. Christ will uphold us in our convictions about the will of God. Christ will help us be, like him, agents of mercy and healing. Christ will help us witness to his power and activity, in our own lives, and in this wide world. And when we are discouraged, and feel our efforts are in vain, he will appear and whisper to our hearts, saying, “Don’t despair; Don’t give up; you are on the right track; you SEE. You SEE through MY eyes. And whatever the hullabaloo has been, the healing will be worth it. AMEN. AMEN.