

Mission Reflection

for the Season of Lent

Seafarers International House



Scripture

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”

The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.¹

Message

It take courage to speak truth to power.

The fact was that the blind man’s sight was restored, but this fact conflicted with conventional understanding. Blindness at birth resulted from sin, that of the infant or the parents, and it couldn’t be reversed. The parents had no explanation and weren’t about to speculate. The man himself could only report what had happened, but when pressed for an explanation, he suggested the possibility of

Mission Reflection

for the Season of Lent

Seafarers International House



Scripture

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”

The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.¹

Message

It take courage to speak truth to power.

The fact was that the blind man’s sight was restored, but this fact conflicted with conventional understanding. Blindness at birth resulted from sin, that of the infant or the parents, and it couldn’t be reversed. The parents had no explanation and weren’t about to speculate. The man himself could only report what had happened, but when pressed for an explanation, he suggested the possibility of

a miracle performed by the Son of God. That was an unacceptable answer to the religious authorities. They declared him a sinner, exiled him and very likely constructed an alternate fact that he was still blind.

Theologians remind us that a Pharisaic attitude is not peculiar to Judaism, but extends to any religion going legalistic.² Haven't our own churches acquiesced in "imperial culture"?³ Are we not more comfortable with our known theologies and religious practices than we are embarking into the unknown to discern God's mission for us? We struggle with multi-culturalism in our churches and our communities, particularly if we sense that the allowance of other theologies and cultures might result in the diminution or total loss of our own.

Both the church in which we worship and the country in which we reside thrive on the full cultural diversity of God's created people. Neither the "blind" of ancient times nor the foreigner of today presents a threat to our religious and national well-being. Only our own fears and insecurities threaten our well-being.

Prayer

Your will, Lord, not ours. Help us to be receptive to transformation through humility and faith in the Gospel. Amen.

1. John 9:18-34
2. Osvaldo Vena, "Commentary on John 9:1-41", WORKING PREACHER, Lutheran Seminary, St. Paul MN, March 26, 2017.
3. Iren Raye, "Vulnerability, Security, Empire, and Confronting Racism: Inspirations from the 2016 Lutheran Ethicists Gathering", JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN ETHICS, May 1, 2016 (commenting upon a presentation by Right Reverend Mark MacDonald, the National Indigenous Bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada)

Postscript: Virtually all the seafarers and immigrants served by Seafarers International House are foreigners. Some are Christians; some are Muslim; some are Hindi; and some are Buddhists. We embrace them all as children of God in different expressions. Seafarers International House stands with them, and we invite you to do so as well. Join our "We Stand" Campaign. Advocate on behalf of all foreign travelers by writing to your Senators (www.senate.gov) and your representatives (www.house.gov). Pray for all foreign travelers, and post your prayers on our We Stand Prayer Board (www.facebook.com/Seafarers-International-House). For more information, log onto Seafarers International House's website. (www.sihnyc.org).

Seafarers International House serves seafarers and immigrants with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It's available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. "Sleep Well By Doing Good."

a miracle performed by the Son of God. That was an unacceptable answer to the religious authorities. They declared him a sinner, exiled him and very likely constructed an alternate fact that he was still blind.

Theologians remind us that a Pharisaic attitude is not peculiar to Judaism, but extends to any religion going legalistic.² Haven't our own churches acquiesced in "imperial culture"?³ Are we not more comfortable with our known theologies and religious practices than we are embarking into the unknown to discern God's mission for us? We struggle with multi-culturalism in our churches and our communities, particularly if we sense that the allowance of other theologies and cultures might result in the diminution or total loss of our own.

Both the church in which we worship and the country in which we reside thrive on the full cultural diversity of God's created people. Neither the "blind" of ancient times nor the foreigner of today presents a threat to our religious and national well-being. Only our own fears and insecurities threaten our well-being.

Prayer

Your will, Lord, not ours. Help us to be receptive to transformation through humility and faith in the Gospel. Amen.

1. John 9:18-34
2. Osvaldo Vena, "Commentary on John 9:1-41", WORKING PREACHER, Lutheran Seminary, St. Paul MN, March 26, 2017.
3. Iren Raye, "Vulnerability, Security, Empire, and Confronting Racism: Inspirations from the 2016 Lutheran Ethicists Gathering", JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN ETHICS, May 1, 2016 (commenting upon a presentation by Right Reverend Mark MacDonald, the National Indigenous Bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada)

Postscript: Virtually all the seafarers and immigrants served by Seafarers International House are foreigners. Some are Christians; some are Muslim; some are Hindi; and some are Buddhists. We embrace them all as children of God in different expressions. Seafarers International House stands with them, and we invite you to do so as well. Join our "We Stand" Campaign. Advocate on behalf of all foreign travelers by writing to your Senators (www.senate.gov) and your representatives (www.house.gov). Pray for all foreign travelers, and post your prayers on our We Stand Prayer Board (www.facebook.com/Seafarers-International-House). For more information, log onto Seafarers International House's website. (www.sihnyc.org).

Seafarers International House serves seafarers and immigrants with pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It's available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. "Sleep Well By Doing Good."