

Once again we have an incredibly full story of an encounter with Jesus from John's gospel. Last week, it was Jesus and the Samaritan woman meeting at a well. This week it is an encounter with a man blind from birth. Both read like chance encounters, but I doubt there was much left to chance in either instance. And while both are full of details often lacking in our bible stories, I'm not sure the details are what is truly important.

So, let's get them out of the way. The disciples ask Jesus whose sin, the man's or his parents' led to his blindness. It was an ancient understanding that sin was the cause of misfortune. Now, we all know that errors in judgment or bad acts often can, and do, lead to consequences. But here Jesus seems to dismiss the belief that sin itself is the cause of misfortune out of hand. Instead of God punishing someone's sin with blindness, Jesus says, somewhat cryptically, "he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him," and then Jesus goes on to heal him – and, in the process, reveal the power of God's grace.

Blindness works on two levels here, literal and figurative. While one character in this story is actually blind, many others are figuratively: the disciples, the neighbors, the Pharisees are all failing to see that which Jesus is showing them.

Maybe the neighbors were jealous of this blind beggar's good fortune. We are all in need of healing, aren't we? Why him and not me?

The Pharisees were also blind, maybe a little jealous, but probably very fearful. They are the authorities in their world. Who is this upstart who is healing and breaking their rules by doing it on the sabbath, getting the crowds all excited about some new possibility of wholeness and all the hope that comes with it.

If seeing is believing, seeing failed them all in this instance. Or maybe they, like the man's parents, did see, but were afraid of proclaiming it lest they be ostracized from the temple, shunned by their neighbors. Lent often invites us to think about our own blind spots: what do we fail to see – and what do we do about it when we do? And maybe more importantly, what do we choose not to see? Because when we see we often then have to do, and like the Pharisees, the neighbors, and even, from time to time, the disciples, we may not want to.

Clearly, the man born blind can now see and knows he is changed by his encounter with Jesus – physically for sure, but I think spiritually as well. Because in his response to their relentless questions, he asks, "Do you also want to become his disciples?" This man can see all the world around him for the first time – but his eyes are fixed on Jesus, the one who has transformed his life. Has he become a disciple? I think he has and he invites others to join him. Maybe there is some exasperation in this invitation – but that doesn't make it less real. "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing," he says and is then driven from the temple because of this new belief.

These are the details. But what is equally important and maybe much more instructive, is that this story, and the woman at the well, are the lectionary choices for this second half of Lent as the runup to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his trial and crucifixion. Important because of what they

reveal about Jesus. After all, if we are going to follow him, take up our own cross, we need to know who it is that we follow.

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman he is the “living water” that will quench every worldly thirst she, and we, might have. And today we hear Jesus identify himself as “the light of the world” which will drive away all darkness. In these two stories Jesus reveals the grace and love of God for all creation through the actions God has him do in God’s name.

Jesus will raise Lazarus from the dead before himself dies. He will go to the cross as an innocent, condemned by a sinful and broken world. And yet, even from the cross he will forgive and redeem the world, calling it back to the wholeness that existed at the beginning of creation.

Because sinners are forgiven. Period. End of story. The Samaritan woman with five husbands was presumed to be a sinner, yet Jesus offered her the living water of eternal life with God. We can be certain that the man born blind was a sinner, who among us, except Jesus, is not, even as we are certain sin did not stop Jesus from healing him.

Jesus came into the world to save the world. From its blindness, its brokenness, its sin and bring all to wholeness and new life. We are sinful, but we are also redeemable. Just like the woman at the well, the man born blind, his neighbors, and even the Pharisees, who sadly remained blind to Jesus to his death. But, with hope in the resurrection all are blessed with the power to see.

As we enter into the second half of Lent, let us open our eyes to the power of God’s love and embrace the one who came so we could know that power, Jesus himself. And let us follow, with courage and joy.