

Impressed with his performance as a warrior, Caesar informed the Roman Senate using just three Latin verbs: *Veni, vidi, vici* meaning: “I came. I saw. I conquered!” As impressive as Caesar’s victory was to his own already over-inflated ego, it does not hold a candle to the testimony of this young man healed by Jesus: “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” (v. 25), explains this man who had never seen daylight before and who became in an instant the subject of the most exciting miracle in the gospels. His is the most fascinating reaction of the five miracles recorded in this chapter of John.

The disciples, looking for a simple answer to a complicated situation, do not see the blind man as one in need of help but as a topic for theological debate. They are blind to what is really happening in this moment between the young man and Jesus. They ask Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (v. 2). Their question is typical because it was rooted in the logic of their world and, indeed, our world. The common Jewish belief was that suffering and affliction are always the fruit of some great sin. “Whom should we blame?” they wanted to know.

They want simple answers to all of life’s questions. They want, as we often do, a rulebook of neatly packaged theology to answer all of their “why” questions. That, however, is not the way of life on this earth. The disciples, as close as they live to Jesus, do not realise that since the fall of Adam in Eden’s Garden everything about this world has been confused and complicated.

Neither of the possibilities the disciples put forward have merit. They had yet to learn that it is wrong to conclude there is always a clear cause and effect for every instance of human suffering and depravity. It is also wrong to assume that God permits every instance of human suffering because he intends to perform a miracle. Jesus is speaking about this man’s circumstances. In doing so, he does not reveal all the reasons why the man was born blind. The disciples see his condition as evidence of God’s judgment. Jesus sees it as an opportunity for God’s grace.

There are some things we do not fully understand. Jesus reminds the disciples, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (vv. 3-4). The blind man’s new sight shows that Jesus, the “light of the world,” can dispel darkness in unique ways. Could it have been that his reason for spitting on the ground was not only to redeem the mud but also to allow that blind man to hear what the Lord was about. We do know that Mark’s gospel records Jesus used his saliva applied to the tongue to heal a deaf man with a speech impediment in Decapolis and to the eyes of another blind man near Bethsaida (Mark 7:33; Mark 8:23).

In our sophisticated age, we may think these healing methods crude but consider another possibility: Could it have been that Jesus was demonstrating God’s ability to use even that which is dirty to demonstrate God’s power to accomplish a wholesome cure? This we know from the record: sight was restored by clay that was made by him whose breath had once breathed life into a man made of clay.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ still has the power to heal a broken body, a broken heart, a broken dream, a broken relationship? Do you need Christ’s healing touch for your bitterness, depression, grief, or fear? Do you need to be healed of anxiety or cynicism? Do you need to know his power to overcome sin or addictions?

Something I heard a few years ago:

*The Christ we follow is still the same,
With blessings that all who will, may claim.
But how often we miss Love’s healing touch,*

By thinking, "We must not expect too much."

What we do know for sure is that the blind man's neighbours are blinded by their low expectations. They do not believe much, expect much, or get much: "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" (v. 9). The change brought about by the touch of the Lord Jesus is so powerful and dramatic that his neighbours find it difficult to believe he is the same person. Concluding it could not possibly be the former beggar, some say, "It is someone like him." The man keeps saying, "I am the man" (v. 9). Is this your life? Are you holding tight to doubt's old wooden crutch? I am persuaded that most of us get out of our relationship with Jesus just about what we expect. Jesus tells us, "According to your faith let it be done to you" (Matthew 9:29).

"They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes" (vv. 13-14). The man's neighbours, out of their unbelief, probably insist on this encounter with their religious experts to hear what the Pharisees would make of his testimony about healing. This would be the formerly blind man's first hearing before the Pharisees. When the Pharisees ask how Jesus had healed him, the blind man explains, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see" (v. 15). Some of them conclude that Jesus could not be from God if he violated the Sabbath. In fact, it is the Pharisees own stringent interpretation of the Sabbath law that is violated. Little do those Pharisees realise that the one who healed is the one who at time's beginning set the Sabbath apart as a weekly day of liberation that would strengthen us in our relationship with him.

Are you missing out on the best that God is doing because your preconceived notions about God blind you? Paul writes, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened" (Ephesians 1:17-18). It is the Apostle's prayer that we will see beyond the merely physical things of this life. There are few things that will stunt our Christian growth more than an unwillingness to consider the possibility that God can and will do things that break through the boundaries of our imaginations or expectations. Do you live with a critical, cynical spirit toward those whose sense of God is different from yours? If you are, there is a real possibility that you will miss some of the good things that God does in our world every day.

The blind man could see and nobody could ever change his eyes or the direction of his heart. His spiritual journey from darkness to light is seen from the way he progresses in his description of his Saviour. He first speaks of his Lord as "The man called Jesus" (v. 11). Next, he speaks of Jesus as "a prophet" (v. 17). Following this he says Jesus is a "man... from God" (v. 37), and finally, "He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him" (v. 38).

His witness is a beautiful example for us. It is not elaborate, a witness simply tells what he has experienced. Through these statements, we learn that faith in Jesus often involves stepping-stones of progress. Perhaps in his pilgrimage you see your own growth in grace and are encouraged. Maybe today you need to determine where you are in your relationship with Jesus. Is he a man once called Jesus, a prophet and wise teacher, a man sent from God or the Christ the Son of the Living God?

This much we know: What Jesus did for this man, he still does for every man and every woman. No one knows what all your needs are, but he knows and that is all you need to know. If you will give your need to God, he will meet it. Will you do that now and come closer to Jesus who loved you even to a cross?

Fr Robert Newton