

Here's Mud in Your Eye

At first glance, you might wonder what the disciples were smoking when they asked Jesus if the man born blind had himself sinned, or if it was his folks' fault.

How does a babe in the womb sin?

And what kind of God punishes a parent's sin by visiting blindness on an innocent child?

Those disciples! What were they drinking?!

Except, maybe we shouldn't be so hard on them. It seems that analyzing people rather than lending a hand is what comes so naturally to we human beings.

A minister tells the story of a young university student who died from anorexia, essentially a disease in which the person starves herself to death.

Leaving her funeral, a woman ran up to the minister and asked if he knew why the young woman died this way. The minister said he had no idea.

So the woman gave the minister her analysis of the situation, and, having done so, walked away.

She had it all figured out.

The Buddha was asked to explain our human situation. He said it is like a man walking through the forest when suddenly an arrow strikes him.

The Buddha explained that most people jump at the questions that have nothing to do with what just happened.

We wonder who shot the arrow.

We wonder why the man is walking through hunting grounds or why he didn't have on a bright orange vest or why the archer was so careless.

The man who was shot, of course, has only one concern: "Get this arrow out of me!"

The Buddha's point was, try as we might to pretend we are simply casual observers of the grime and grit of the world, we each of us walk through life shot with an arrow.

But, in order to avoid our own injury, we focus on the whys and wherefores of what's wrong with the other guy.

The disciples today are the casual observers that the Buddha describes.

Why is this guy born blind?

Let us count the reasons!

(And as we count, let us never ask if WE too are blind!)

But Jesus is having none of it. Instead of talking *about* the blind man, Jesus speaks *with* the blind man.

Instead of treating the blind man as an object of contempt or curiosity or condemnation, Jesus treats him as a human being.

In short, instead of wondering *why* he is blind, Jesus gives him *back* his sight.

And in response, all of the folks with 20/20 vision prove their own deep blindness.

I think we are often not so different.

How many times do we look at troubled teens and discuss theories of anti-social behavior, or analyze why a broken family is broken, or discuss all the reasons this or that immigrant group will never succeed.

Need an expert on why sinners sin, on why some are poor and others rich, on why we can't possibly cure what ails the world?

Just ask, I'm happy to explain it to you!

Yet this is not the way of Jesus. Nor is it the way that Jesus calls us to follow.

With spit and mud (you don't get any more down to earth than that, or messier!) Jesus gives new eyes to the blind man.

And in that act of healing, both Jesus and the blind man are attacked by all the good religious people; shunned even by the man's own parents; and tossed out of the church for daring to experience the light.

We are in the midst of Lent. Lent is the season of hard lessons.

Lent is the time to turn around, to change minds, to repent, to see life in a different way.

Today's lesson is a hard lesson.

It is a warning to all of us who feel assured that we are right with God.

It is a warning to all of us who, because we follow the rules, attend the Mass, give what we think is enough, and don't overtly do bad things, that all is well with our souls.

So thought the Pharisees, so thought the churchgoers, so thought the bystanders, in today's gospel lesson.

And today, Jesus warns us: You are all wrong!

We are none of us simply observers of the mud, of the spit, of the messiness in life.

Whether that messiness be immigrants or disaffected youth, or hunger or poverty or intolerance or ignorance, our job is not to sit around and complain or analyze or size up the situation.

Our job, as followers of Jesus, is to “work the works of He who sends” us.

That work is sheltering the homeless, welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, visiting the prisoners, healing the sick. And it includes paying attention to our own needs, our own lack, our own emptiness.

Unless we are engaged in doing the works of God, we are at great risk of becoming even ourselves the same blind Pharisees whom Jesus so roundly castigates.

“Wonder, not suspicion, is the beginning of worship, and seeing is believing only if we are willing to believe.” B. Brown Taylor.

We have much to do here at St. Elizabeth’s Church. And I do think of it that way. Not as my church or yours, but as St. Elizabeth’s Church.

Our patron, the mother of St. John the Baptist, whose son dressed in rags and ate bugs, who challenged the king of his day and who gave his life as the herald of our Lord.

These are the footsteps we of St. Elizabeth’s Church walk in.

For over 100 years, ours is a heritage of welcoming the newly arrived to our shores, of providing a warm place to sleep, a hot meal, job training and fellowship.

It was for that purpose that we were endowed by a wealthy mainland family, whose endowment even today pays nearly a third of our yearly budget.

For over 100 years, this place, the gateway into Hawaii, has faithfully walked the call of Jesus to serve the least, the neediest, the poor.

We now carry out that proud legacy, with spit and mud, and we are the fortunate few to see miracles come forth from that same spit, that same mud.

From spit and mud come new eyes to see the light.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world!

So if in darkness, we have discussed the foibles and shortcomings of others; let us pray for the light of Jesus to pierce that darkness and to set a table of fellowship where we may all be one.

If in darkness we have congratulated ourselves on our honorable lives; let us pray that the light of Jesus heals our shallowness with the embrace of unconditional love.

If in darkness we have divided the world into insiders and outsiders; let us pray that the light of Jesus makes clear God's determination to have us all.

May we "live as children of the light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is Good and right and true."

A few years after the disciples asked Jesus about the cause of the man's blindness, Peter and John were on their way to pray.

At the Temple gate was a man born, not blind, but, from birth, unable to walk.

His friends placed him there to beg.

When the disciples saw the man, they went straight to him and said: "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!"

The disciples learned a lesson today.

Pray God, we have too.

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