

“How Will YOU Respond to God’s Next Miracle?”

“As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

That was the theological controversy of the day.

Conditions like blindness were seen by most people as God’s punishment for sin.

But in the case of someone who was born blind, opinion was divided.

Some Pharisees believed that the person must have sinned in the womb;
others held that that was impossible and therefore it must be the sin of the parents
that had resulted in their child’s blindness.

Those were the 2 possible choices, and the disciples wanted to know which Jesus believed.

But as was usual for Jesus, when he was presented with a multiple-choice question
with “a” or “b” as the possible answers, he didn’t circle either, but wrote out his own answer.

And his answer to this question is an answer that was not only outside of the Pharisee’s answer box,
but is pretty much out of our current thinking as well:

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.”

Think about that for a minute.

According to Jesus, God caused, or at least allowed, this man to be born blind
and to suffer blindness throughout infancy and childhood and into adulthood
so that one day Jesus might work a miracle and cure him.

That’s a piece of theology that we don’t spend a lot of time talking about in our tradition,
probably because it is offensive, or at least unsettling, to our human ears
to think that our loving God would ever intentionally cause us suffering.

And yet, that is a truth that is woven throughout scripture:

that it is God’s will and God’s kingdom and God’s power and God’s glory that take center stage –
while we are the ones in the audience who are there to praise and bless and thank and adore.

Or to look at it another way, if God would allow Jesus to suffer and die in order to show forth God’s power to raise him,
why should we assume that we would be exempt?

The truth of the matter is that the only time we can be sure it is God who has done something
is when there is no way that we can take credit.

That’s the point of the story of Gideon who was preparing for an invasion of 135,000 troops.

He worked hard and managed to muster 32,000 men, or a quarter of the advancing army.

And God said, “You’ve got too many. Cut down the number.”

So Gideon cut it down to 10,000, and still God said, “It’s too many. Cut it down again.”

Finally when there were only 300 men left, God said, “Okay. Now you can fight.”

300 vs. 135,000. Why would God insist on such impossible odds?

So that it would be **ABSOLUTELY, TOTALLY, COMPLETELY** clear
that it was God and **NOT** Gideon and his army who had won the battle.

So what that means is that sometimes, God intentionally puts us in situations that seem impossible,
in order for us to stop trusting in our own wisdom, and to trust in God instead.

So how do we know when we are to stop trying to apply human solutions and to trust God?

There are 3 principles that we can glean from this story.

The first principle goes back to the disciple’s original question: why is this man blind?

According to the teaching of the day there were only 2 possible reasons according to the religious authorities.

But Jesus rejects the limits of that thinking, and offers another possibility.

So our first lesson is that whenever the system tells us that we only have a certain number of options,
we need to realize that that’s the lie inherent in most systems,
and that for creative minds, the possibilities are limitless.

The second principle is found in Jesus' focus. The disciples were focused on what was – the disability, the ill-health, the lack that currently existed in the man's situation – they didn't even stop to imagine that that situation could change or that God in Jesus could intervene with a miracle that would completely change things.

Jesus, however, was focused, not on the blindness but on the man, not on explaining what was, but envisioning what could be, not on apparent lack, but on God's abundance, not on what could not be done by humans, but what could be done by God,

So our second lesson is that whenever we see lack or limits, or decline or death, or any situation that seems impossible, we need to shift our perspective to focus not on what seems lacking in the physical realm, but on God's abundance in the spiritual, to envision not what we see with our natural eyes, but what we can see with the eyes of faith, to believe not in our own inability to change things, but in God's ability to do the impossible.

And the third principle is that the disbelievers are only concerned about the "whats" and the "wheres" and the "whens" and the "hows" while Jesus focuses on the "why".

The neighbors ask, *"how were your eyes opened?"* and *"where is he?"*

The Pharisees ask, *"How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?"*

"What do you say about him?" *"How...does he...see?"* *"What did he do to you?"*

"How did he open your eyes?" and *"we do not know where he comes from!"*

But Jesus does not focus on these mundane details that have to do about human control.

Instead Jesus focuses on the "who" & the "why" – *"he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."*

And so, our first priority must be to focus on what God wants to happen in a particular situation, so that God's miraculous power might be experienced so that lives are forever changed.

And the fourth and final principle we need to remember is that even when a miracle does completely change the lives of those who have experienced it for themselves, it will still not convince those who have closed their eyes and their minds.

Jesus performed an incredible miracle – he gave sight to a man who had been blind from birth!

And yet the neighbors doubt, and the parents fear, and the Pharisees deny. But that's their loss.

The man has lost a lot, too – his parents refused to support him,

and his faith community and therefore the community at large cast him out – but not only has he received his sight, he has experienced the healing love of Jesus, which is worth far more than anything else.

I believe that God can change our lives as dramatically as God changed the life of the man born blind – both our individual lives and our life together.

And when that happens – notice I say "when" and not "if" –

remember that there will be those who will continue to fear and doubt and deny, but that will be their loss.

For those who experience the miracles, that will be all that matters.

So, to sum up today's story there are 4 principles to remember:

1. Whenever the system tells us that we only have a certain number of options, we need to realize that that's a lie and the possibilities are limitless;
2. Whenever we see lack or limits, or decline or death with our natural eyes, the eyes of faith can show us the abundance & growth & life that God desires for us;
3. Whenever we find ourselves caught up in the whats & whens & wheres & hows of our desires, we need to step back & focus on how God's power might be experienced so that lives are forever changed; and
4. When God performs a miracle there will be those who will fear & doubt & deny, but for those who experience the miracle, it will be life transforming.

And if those are too much to remember, let me boil it down for you.

1. Hold out for more options.
2. Envision not what is, but what can be.
3. Look for the impossible situations in which God can work a miracle.
4. Don't let anyone steal your joy.

Will you pray with me?

Gracious God,

as the eyes of the man born blind were opened by Jesus, so open our eyes to see all the possibilities before us.

As the heart of that man was touched by Jesus, so touch our hearts.

As the life of that man was transformed, so transform our lives.

And as that man experienced and became a witness to your miracle of healing,

so, too, may we experience and become a witness to your boundless power and endless love.

We pray in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Spirit. Amen