

Ever since he was a child, a man had a fear of someone under his bed at night. So he went to a psychiatrist and told him: "I've got problems. Every time I go to bed I think there's somebody under it. I'm scared. I think I'm going crazy."

"Just put yourself in my hands for 1 year," said the psychiatrist. "Come talk to me 3 times a week, and we should be able to get rid of those fears."

"How much do you charge?"

"\$150 a visit," replied the doctor. "I'll sleep on it," said the man.

Six months later the doctor met the man on the street. "Why didn't you come to see me about those fears you were having?" he asked. "Well, \$150 a visit, 3 times a week for a year, is \$23,400. A bartender cured me for \$10. I was so happy to have saved all that money that I went and bought a new pickup truck."

"Is that so?" With a bit of an attitude he said, "And how, may I ask, did a bartender cure you?" "He told me to cut the legs off the bed. Ain't nobody can fit under there now."

It's always better to get a second opinion!

This is not your ordinary healing. Without a word of warning, Jesus spit on the ground, made mud of the spit and put it on the blind man's eyes. Then, and only then, He spoke. "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam," he told the man.

Strange, isn't it? But not really – not in John's gospel. In this Gospel nothing is what it seems to be. Everything that happens points to something else. In an ordinary story you'd expect some hint of this poor man's wonder at the new world that opens up before his eyes. But that's not John's point. He directs our attention beyond the man's eyes to his soul. The light that pours into the man's now seeing eyes is nothing compared to the light that's dawning in his soul. The man is groping his way toward faith. He's beginning to see the real light, the light of the world. It's easy to see why this is one of the 3 ancient stories that the Church has always used to form its Elect on their way to the Easter Sacraments, along with the Woman at the Well, and the raising of Lazarus.

The trajectory of the story is ironic. At first the blind man barely knows Jesus' name. At the end of the story, he says "LORD, I believe." The beggar becomes a worshiper. Meanwhile, the religious leaders, custodians of God's truth and guides to God's people, grow increasingly unbelieving. They search for some theological flaw in Jesus' behavior, some mistake in the rubrics of this healing so that they can overturn the obvious medical verdict.

The irony is tragic. The blind man sees with increasing clarity while the religious people grow increasingly blind. The blind man's spiritual vision becomes clearer and sharper while those who claim spiritual sight plunge into ever increasing darkness. This is a necessary word for our time – and for us. Barbara Brown Taylor suggests that if there were auditions for this play, "most of us would go after the part of the blind man. It's a hard part, but a great part. There he is just minding his own tin-cup business when the light of the world comes along and opens his eyes, shoving him into the spotlight....."

But we're not like him. As Taylor suggests, we're not naturals for the part. Most of us are not outsiders in the village, tin cups in hand, sitting outside the city gates begging. We've not been consigned to

the margins for our sins, imagined or otherwise. We are consummate insiders, law-abiding, church going, good folks. We are the ones who profess spiritual sight. We're NOT blind.

That's why we need to listen to this story very carefully. It's easy for insiders to end up acting like the Pharisees in this story. Insiders have a tragic tendency to forget the darkness of our own souls. It's a human tendency actually. We tend to fool ourselves. We are all blind to some extent.

In December of 1992, the WALL STREET JOURNAL (12/21/92) published a fascinating article titled, "Why Smart People Do Dumb Things." We've all seen it in business, education, politics, the church, and life. Great men and women, leaders who should know better in fact, people with a great track record, make huge mistakes. They know better, but....

It's a theme as old as the human race. The Greeks wrote whole plays about *hubris*, the self-destructive pride that afflicts us all, especially the more gifted. Herodotus wrote "It is the gods' custom to bring low all things of surpassing greatness." The Greeks saw *hubris* as a kind of madness, and had a saying, "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad." Peter Drucker paraphrased the quote to apply to business in our time: "Whom the gods would destroy, they first give 10 years of success."

Ken Olson, the founder of the Digital Equipment Corporation, was a deacon in his church in Boston. His company was one of the great success stories of the 70s and 80s. One year Ken was picked as one of FORTUNE magazine's entrepreneurs of the year. He said that so much success was the worst thing that ever happened to Digital. It set them up for failure. They didn't think they could do anything wrong and he included himself in the indictment. The WALL STREET JOURNAL article said that the apparent end of long success is severe "feedback deafness." The great ones no longer pay attention. They think they are beyond the mistakes of ordinary mortals.

We've all seen this problem – in somebody else! We just can't seem to see our own blind spots, and when we mess up, we do the only thing reasonable. BLAME SOMEONE ELSE! We just don't think this happens in us. We can see the darkness in others; but it is very difficult to see it in ourselves. Sadly, I've had too many conversations with young people whose souls are deeply scarred by growing up in the church. They are seldom turned off by Jesus or His teaching, but they have little use for the Church. They've seen too much hypocrisy. Adults tell them that faith and the Church are really important. But the kids watch the parents – not singing, not contributing, not serving, and they recognize that this really isn't important at all.

The really frightening thing is that I know I'm one of the hypocrites. How many of my words are NOT matched by corresponding deeds? How many people have I scandalized by my behavior? I'm afraid of the answer. I am constantly amazed at God's foolishness in putting THIS sinner in a pulpit every Sunday.

If we are honest with God and ourselves, a story like this one confronts us with a sobering reality. Here Jesus puts us all on notice about the blindness in our souls. In a few moments we will celebrate the Second Scrutiny ritual – an exorcism where we will name some of the darkness and blindness that came from the discussion and preparation of the Elect. We will pray KYRIE ELEISON – THE LORD REIGNS over this - -the LORD OF LIGHT will overcome the darkness and blindness in our lives and in our world. And, as always, in the end, the Church comes not to dwell on the darkness, but to bring us to the light. To give us the good news. The Good News is in the heart of this 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of John. Notice what Jesus said before He spit on the ground to make the mud. He looked at that blind man and said, "I am the light of the world." (v. 5)

Which takes us right back to the beginning – to Genesis – to creation – when darkness covered the face of the deep and the earth was a formless void. LET THERE BE LIGHT, God said, and there was light. Then God

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bent down and made man and woman from the clay of the earth. And here Jesus, the Light of the World, bends down to the clay again, makes mud, and allows us to see. It is a scene deliberately designed to remind us of the creation story, for Jesus is making a new creation by His proclamation of the Kingdom. Jesus speaks I AM THE LIGHT, and there is light in a blind man's eyes – and soul. "Lord I believe," the man said. And now he has eyes in his soul.

That same God, the God who comes to us in Jesus Christ, knows the brooding darkness, the moral chaos in our own souls and in our world. God knows the deceptive darkness in our own hearts. But know this: God has not and will not give up on what He loves. KYRIE ELEISON. He reigns forever over all.

Here and now, God is forming us anew. Here and now, God is forming us as a people of moral vision that is not shaped by the darkness of this broken world. We, the church of Jesus Christ, are growing toward a moral and spiritual vision formed by values of eternity. Because we follow the One who is the Light, we see things from a new and transforming point of view.

God's people, folks formed by the Light, are by the very nature of things, *people of hope*. Despite the thickening darkness all around us, despite war in Ukraine, we refuse to be bad news people. The Light creates "Good News People" who refuse to permit the growing darkness to darken our souls. For we know the Spirit of the living God still hovers over our world and continues to speak the creative words, "let there be light." And we know that here, there, and everywhere, God's light reaches out to touch a man, a woman, a child, a church. And nothing is the same.

People of the light who form the church are also *people of grace*. Our new moral vision permits us to see not only what is, but what can be. Our Old Testament reading (1 Sam 16:1-13) tells of the prophetic vision given to Samuel to see in the shepherd boy David what his father and brothers could not see: the man who would one day be the greatest king of Israel.

People of the Light, men and women with sight-lines formed by the kingdom of God, are people learning to see with prophetic vision. No longer bound by what is, we see what each other and our world can be – because of the Light! Kingdom vision offers us a world to work for – a world of peace, of justice, forgiveness, and love. God isn't finished with any of us – or this world. And therein lies our hope.

May we be light for one another – and light for our world. Seeing with the vision of Christ. Amen.  
(adapted from David C. Fisher, "Sight for Sore Eyes" in THE LIBRARY OF DISTINCTIVE SERMONS, Vol 5, p. 36-43)