



A LENTEN RETREAT: Week Four

We continue this week with the story of the Man Born Blind. Like last week's story of the Woman at the Well, these three stories highlight what discipleship is all about. These stories invite us to reflect on where we are in our discipleship of Jesus. This part of the retreat then will invite us to go deeper into our own personal relationship with Jesus and try to discover where Jesus is inviting us in this relationship. Deepening on how honest we are with ourselves and how deeply we reflect on these stories, will determine where the retreat takes us in the next few weeks.

The story of the Man Born Blind invites us to reflect on how faith grows in the midst of the trials we encounter in life. None of us live life without certain trials, struggles, or difficulties. As we move closer to the heart of our faith in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, we will be asked to unite our sufferings in life with those of Jesus on the cross. This week invites us to begin to see that connection in the small trials we encounter in our daily lives. As the story of the Woman at the Well invited us to reflect on the initial obstacles to faith, this week invites us to see that our initial faith is not quite enough. We need to keep growing in our faith.

Just as last week's story about water from the well was connected to baptism, so also is this week's story connected to baptism. Baptism has an anointing with Sacred Chrism - the man has mud smeared on his eyes. Baptism was thought to be a time of conversion and the man after being healed not only comes to physical sight but more importantly comes to "see" or believe in Jesus. He comes to the enlightenment of faith. But it is only gradually, through his trials that he comes to this moment of truly "seeing" and believing in Jesus.

We can follow the man's progression of faith as we hear his words after each encounter in the story. When asked by the crowds who healed him, he says, "the man they call Jesus." (9:11) Then when he is brought before the Pharisees and asked theological questions he concludes, "that Jesus was a prophet." (9:17) After being threatened with expulsion from the synagogue, he recognizes Jesus as "a man from God." (9:33) And finally, when he is expelled from the synagogue, he encounters Jesus who asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" And the man replies, "I do believe." He progresses from seeing Jesus as some man to be-

"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"... He said, "I do believe, Lord."

lieving in him as the Son of Man. Each encounter or trial leads him deeper into this relationship with Jesus.

We also need to look at those who questioned the man born blind. There was a division amongst them. There were some who said that Jesus could not be sinful because he did such signs (healings). But there were others who thought that Jesus had sinned because he had done work on the Sabbath. God had commanded that they keep holy the Sabbath and one way to do that was not to do menial work. Kneading clay was thought to be menial work and Jesus kneaded clay to make the paste to put on the man's eyes in order to heal him. Thus they felt that Jesus had broken the law. Those who decided that kneading clay was menial work might have remembered their time as slaves in Egypt when kneading clay was part of the work they did to make bricks for the Egyptians and thus it was forbidden. They most likely had not given any thought to kneading clay in order to heal a man of his blindness.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES FOR THE WEEK

The Man Born Blind

John 9:1-41

The Man Born Blind -
[reread this](#)

Romans 8:31-39

Trials cannot separate
us from the love of
Christ

Matthew 5:13-16

Salt and light for the
world

Daniel 3: 13-24

Witness of the young
men

Mark 10:17-22

What more do I need
to do?

Wisdom 9:1-12

Prayer for wisdom

Matthew 5:1-12

Beatitudes

Use one of the forms
of praying with
Scripture from last
week's bulletin or
simply read the
above passages and
hear God speaking
to you of his love.

This is part of the challenge that Jesus presented to the religious leaders of his time, and to us today, we have to be cautious about applying religious judgments from the past, without nuance, to new situations.

The parents of the man born blind can also enlighten us about discipleship. They knew better than anyone what Jesus had done for their son. But they refused to say anything publicly because they feared that they would be thrown out of the synagogue.

They remind us that being disciples of Jesus will at times demand that we stand up for what we believe in. Sometimes that will come at some cost to us. We all struggle with whether or not we are willing to pay the price for being disciples of Jesus. Some will stand up for Jesus at great cost to themselves, and others will nominally accept Jesus as long as it doesn't cost them anything.

“We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is still day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

The story of the Man Born Blind invites us to reflect on how our own faith has grown through the trials of life. We might reflect back on how our faith has grown through the trials or struggles we have experienced in our life. It might be good to recognize how far we have come in our faith and the times we have stood up for our faith. We might also recognize those times when we have not been willing to accept the cost of being disciples of Jesus. We might search to find where we need God's strength to keep being faithful and where we need his strength to overcome our fears.

We might also look at how we are applying our faith to new situations and issues in our day. Like the Pharisees who struggled with the new approach of Jesus to faith, we need to honestly wrestle with the issues that we encounter today trying to hold on to the values of our faith, but also being open to where our faith is calling us to be more inclusive, more healing, more inviting, and more open to all people. Jesus challenged people to extend the boundaries and limits that they imposed on people, and he challenges us to do the same today.

The story on one level is about physical blindness, but on a much deeper level it is about the blindness of faith. Just as the man overcomes his physical blindness in order to see, we need to overcome the blindness of our faith in order to see things as Jesus sees them.