

Transfiguration Sunday
February 27, 2022
Rev. Katherine McCloskey

John 9:26-41

The Temple officials persisted, 'Just what did Jesus do to you? How did he open your eyes?'

'I already told you, but you won't listen to me,' came the answer. 'Why do you want to hear it all over again? Don't tell me you want to become disciples of Jesus too!'

They retorted scornfully, 'You're the one who is Jesus' disciple. We're disciples of Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this Jesus comes from.'

The other retorted: 'Well, this is news! You don't know where He comes from, yet He opened my eyes! We know that God doesn't hear sinners, but that if people are devout and obey God's will, God listens to them. It is unheard of that anyone ever gave sight to a person blind from birth. If this One were not from God, He could never have done such a thing!'

'What!' they exclaimed; 'You're steeped in sin from birth and you're giving us lectures?' With that they threw the person out.

When Jesus heard of the expulsion, He sought out the healed one and asked, 'Do you believe in the Chosen One?'

The other answered, 'Who is this One, that I may believe?'

'You're looking at Him,' Jesus replied. 'The Chosen One is speaking to you now.'

The healed one said, 'Yes, I believe,' and worshipped Jesus.

And Jesus said, 'I came into this world to execute justice - to make the sightless see and the seeing blind.'

Some of the Pharisees who were nearby heard this and said, 'You're not calling us blind, are You?'

To which Jesus replied, "If you were blind there would be no sin in that. But since you say, "We see" your sin remains.

This is the Gospel of Christ. ***Praise Be to the Lord Jesus Christ.***

While I was doing my usual amount of reading and writing and praying about how the words of John's Gospel, intersect with today's world, I came across the Rev.

Simon Woodman's thoughts on these things. In reading his words, I realized that he was articulating not just what he had been feeling but also what we have been feeling about the horror, the fear and the heartbreak that are the result of Russia's attack on the Ukraine...

On Thursday this week, wrote Rev Woodman, the world took another step in the dark. As we watched the assembled military might of Russia roll out across the Ukraine and as civilians flee their homeland seeking safety across borders, echoes of the darkest hours of the two world wars are hard to ignore. And as we gaze across our continent to those whose lives have descended into the darkness of war, I can hear an echo of the opening questions from our reading today,

Rabbi, who sinned, these Ukrainians or their parents that they should lose from their lives the light of freedom and peace?

And I'm sure we would want to echo in reply, the word of Jesus, that neither they nor their parents sinned.

The young people in my home are wondering why the conflict in the Ukraine is happening and what it will mean for everyone if this is the beginning of a third world war...

But as easy as it would be for me to answer their question by pointing to the failure of this or that country to live like peace-loving Canadians, to do so would be to turn a blind eye toward how we have benefited from political structures that cause harm to others. When Rev. Woodman talked about Western world accountabilities, he did so from the perspective of the country in North America that he lives in.

It is too soon, he wrote, for a proper analysis of the causes of the war in the Ukraine. And that it is better to focus on prayers for peace and actions of mercy. But, if history is our vantage point, then multiple failures in diplomacy, relationships and trust, and the rapid and strategic inclusion of former Soviet countries into NATO, is likely a trigger. Woodman continued by pondering the impact of immigration policies that have made it difficult for Syrian and Afghanistan refugees to find their way to his country's shoreline...to find welcome and a chance to begin a new life.

He stated that It's almost as if people believe that these refugees somehow deserve their plight, maybe for being born in the wrong country or for speaking the wrong language or having the wrong colour skin.

Such is the way of deeply rooted prejudice and nationalism that surface in times of conflict...

Rabbi, who sinned, these Ukrainians or their parents that they should lose from their lives the light of freedom and peace?

There is great deal that we can learn from how Ukrainian Christians are responding to what has been happening in their country. Even as bombs fell around them, neighbours made plans to care for their neighbours. More specifically, Baptists, were making plans to create "centres of hope" at churches in each of the Ukraine's westernmost regions, to provide shelter to displaced persons. Other churches are being mobilized along evacuation routes, so food and clothing and rest can be offered.

And in doing this, remind us of the power of light against the darkness that exists, not just where they are, but in the world more generally. Such that we might recognize that darkness is not just over there, in the hearts of those who attack and in the lives of their victims. Rather, the darkness of violence, prejudice and greed are over here too. Showing us that the entire world is under the shadow of deep darkness.

...Awakening within us a deep longing for a light to shine in the darkness...to expose the one's who cause harm...making it impossible for us to remain blind to the struggles that other people face...a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path...

It is a level of growing awareness that brings us to the plight of the man born blind and the awkwardness with which his story is traditionally approached because of poor translations that overlook differences in Greek and English sentence structures. Read directly from the Greek, the revelation of God's works is not in the man's blindness, but in the transformation of the people who became aware of and were changed by his story.

When questioned about his encounter with Jesus, the blind man answered.

All I know is that I used to be blind, and now I can see.

Closer to home, the darkness of violence and prejudice is manifested in harm caused to our indigenous brothers and sisters. It was with this in mind that I attended a seminar this week that was hosted by the Rev. Dr Ray Aldred. Dr Aldred, who is Cree, is the Director of Indigenous studies at the Vancouver School of Theology... Who when asked to share his vision for Healing and Reconciliation, said it must begin with the healing of the land. To which he added that his mandate was

to heed the prophetic call of the children who had been lost but have now been found in unmarked graves

His most powerful point being that for a vision to be cast, it must come from the heart of who we are...and that put in very simple terms, involves people on a journey toward learning to speak not with their minds as much with their hearts. We cannot think our way to healing. It must be felt.

He talked about how land can never really be owned because it is something that we borrow from our grandchildren...to which I would like to add; there are a lot of grandchildren being harmed by what is going on in the Ukraine because Putin prefers a puppet regime over acknowledging the sovereignty of his neighbours.

Rabbi, who sinned, these Ukrainians or their parents that they should lose from their lives the light of freedom and peace?

Neither did this one nor their parents sin, answered Jesus, Today's darkness exists in order that the works of God can be manifest in us so that works of the one who sent Jesus may be manifest in the world.

The message behind Jesus' encounter with the blind man is clear. Beginning with the fact that we cannot, should not and must not blame people for their suffering. And that no one 'deserves' to live in the shadow of darkness...and just as importantly, that the works of God become known in the world when ordinary people like you and like me, shine light in the darkness by working for justice, mercy and peace.

Thanks be to God

AMEN