

### Blindness, Sight, Salvation

John's quite a story-teller, isn't he? One of my commentaries described this story as a "comedy in six scenes." What do you think—is it a comedy? Or is it more of a tragedy? Or we might ask, is it good news, or is it bad news? Does it have a happy ending, or a sad ending? It depends on who we ask, right?

Let's start with the Pharisees. Good news? Or bad news? They don't come out looking so great, do they? The last line of the play is brutal. "Now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains." Ouch! That's quite a condemnation. I think we would have to say that this story from the Gospel of John is bad news for all people everywhere who think they have all the answers. People who are rigid and unbending. Who are stuck in their own understanding of God and the world. Who are unable to change their mind. Unable to learn new truths. Do any of you know someone like that? Surely none of us are that way?! Of course, that's what the Pharisees said.

I'm not sure we're ever off the hook on that one. I think this story never stops condemning anyone, including us, anytime we think we have all the right answers, anytime we get stuck in our understanding of the truth.

This story isn't only bad news for the Pharisees; it's bad news for us. It's saying we must be constantly vigilant about this human tendency to think we're right and others are wrong, this tendency to stop growing. The moment we think we've arrived, we haven't. The moment we say "we see," we don't.

How about the man born blind? Bad news or good news? Good, right? He got healed of his blindness! For the first time in his life, he could see! Many of us have experienced healing in our own lives. Perhaps healing not as dramatic as the blind man. But any healing is wonderful, isn't it? We might even say miraculous. Think about it. The healing of a sore or wound. Healing of a broken bone. Healing from an illness. Healing of a hurt. Healing of a broken relationship. Healing is definitely good news, part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But then, after he was healed, the man born blind got kicked out of the synagogue. He got a little too talkative. And there is no hint in the text that he might ever be let in again. I find myself thinking about all those who have been kicked out or kept out of the church. Whether because of their sexual identity, or any other "perceived sin," or for that matter, any "real sin." Getting kicked out or kicking others out of the synagogue or church is never good news; it's never the gospel. It's tragedy. And it keeps happening.

How about the man's parents? Was it good news or bad news? Good news, right? They managed to carefully avoid being put out of the synagogue, which the text directly tells us is what they were afraid of. They managed to say only what they knew wouldn't get them in trouble. What a relief, right? Except, at what cost? They lost their son. Did they even care? They were his parents, and they didn't stand up for him; they were his family, and they didn't stand by him.

I'm mindful of all the brokenness we have in our own families. Including our church family. All the times or ways we have refused to stand up for one another. All the times we

have said only what we knew would not get us in trouble. Refusing to care about the cost. Caring only about our own skin.

Brokenness in human relationships is never good news. It's always bad news. Always tragedy.

Let's see; who are we missing? Oh yes, the neighbors of the blind man. Well, they also were not put out of the synagogue. In this story they are nothing more than innocent and basically harmless foils for the primary plot. They were neither good nor bad—they were just there. Which is another way of saying they were clueless. They couldn't make up their minds. "Is it him? I don't know. It could be him. Or maybe someone like him." I'm reminded of the book of Revelation, where the writer says to the church in Laodicea, "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

They were indecisive. Indifferent. Unobservant. Uninformed. Uninvolved. Not paying attention. May God forgive us when we are these things.

Speaking of forgiveness . . . It may sound as if this drama in the Gospel of John is pretty much bad news or tragedy or sad ending for everybody. Don't believe everything you hear. Redemption is always possible. Even if it's outside of the story as we have it. The neighbors can always decide to get more involved, more informed, to start paying better attention. The parents may decide at some point in the unknown future to reclaim their son, to stand by him. The Pharisees might not be able to now, but at some point in the future they might be ready to admit, "Okay, I might not have all the answers. I might even be wrong. I see now (pun intended) that I have my own blind spots. Open my eyes, Jesus, that I may see more fully."

Which brings us back to the man born blind. The good news is his blindness was healed. The bad news is he was put out of the synagogue, and basically abandoned by his parents. But let us not forget the final good news that happens yet within our drama. After he heard that the man had been driven out, Jesus looks for the man. And he finds him. And he reveals himself to him. And the man believes. And he falls down in worship.

We might say that this drama is both tragedy and feel-good comedy. It's neither bad news, per se, nor good news. Rather, it's a story about Jesus taking bad news and making good news out of it. May he do the same for us, and in the world around us.