

A Sermon Preached at Maple Street Congregational Church, UCC
Danvers, MA
Rev. Kevin M Smith
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John 9:1-7

Blind to the Light

Our poor disciples! They often seem to be the foils against which Jesus teaches people about God's true love. So often the disciples seem to be "out to lunch" or "just don't get it" when Jesus is trying to teach them or tell them something about his life and mission work for God.

Remember the story when Jesus was telling them that he was about to suffer and die? Peter, who would later become the rock that the church was built upon, would have nothing to do with it and tried to tell Jesus that it just couldn't be true. Peter had a very different idea what kind of messiah Jesus should be. Jesus finally gets so upset at his blindness to the truth that he shouts at him, "Get behind me Satan!" Peter couldn't help his blindness about the kind of kingdom Jesus was living in. Peter was too caught up in the power-blindness of the world.

Or, how about the time two disciples, James and John the sons of Zebedee, were arguing about who would be sitting at the right hand of Jesus in heaven. They were blind to the notion that heaven is more about—and God's kingdom—is more about radical equality than self-aggrandizement or self-seeking power. Again, they were blind to the ways of the kind of parallel kingdom of God that Jesus was preaching about and living in. The forlorn disciples seemed a bit blinded by the culture they were living in and failed to recognize what it means to be witnesses to God's kingdom of love, compassion, equality, and welcome.

It often seems our minds are stuck in standard cultural norms that can be unfair to certain groups of people. Then, sometimes we abide by that old adage that we do things this way because that's just the way we always do things, which keeps us stuck. Too often in our culture we are taught that success and progress are all about power or fame and we are blind to the work and ministry that God has for us to do as the people of God. We get hung up the comfortable way to do things or just fail to see how Jesus is really teaching us to live out our lives—it's like were blinded to what it means to really listen to and live out our Christian faith and when our culture says act a different way. Like this guy who was pulled over by the police officer and just couldn't comprehend the point the patrolman was trying to make:

A police officer pulls a guy over and the guy has two penguins in the backseat. The officer says, "You can't drive around with endangered penguins. You need to take them to the zoo." The guy says he will, and the officer lets him go. The next day, the officer pulls the same guy over and the penguins are in the backseat again, only today they're wearing Hawaiian shirts and sunglasses. The officer says, "Hey! I told you to take those penguins to the zoo!" The guy says, "I did that yesterday. Today we're going to the beach!"

Just like our sometimes oblivious disciples this guy just couldn't crawl out of his own concept of what was right and wrong in God's kingdom in which endangered species, including some people, are endangered by their own culture.

In our story from the Gospel of John this morning, we really must ask ourselves who was the one who was blind. The man, this stranger along the side of the road just minding his own business becomes an object of ridicule from the disciples who have been following Jesus. Go figure. Yes, they actually think this man's physical blindness was due to the sins of his parents. They ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?" Thankfully, our culture has progressed to the point where we can recognize that someone suffering a physical ailment isn't necessarily afflicted because of some sin they or their parents committed. Well, on second thought, that may still be true in some folks today who look down upon or fear others because of the color of their skin, the faith they practice, or the neighborhood they come from in town. Perhaps we haven't progressed so far after all. But, Jesus is calling us to do differently right? What did Jesus say that day on that road to his disciples?

Jesus said, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world's Light."

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Isn't that why we are people of faith? Isn't that why we come to church? Are we not here to try living our lives in God's "kin-dom?" A "kingdom" where we all realize what Jesus was trying to teach his disciples—that we, in the end, are all "kin" to each other and God's kin, or God's children, created in the image of God. Not created in the images our culture says we should be, or TV commercials say we should be. But, rather, created to be kin to God where love, compassion, equality, fairness, and kindness guide our very intentions and actions.

You and I have chosen to be faith seekers and actors and we are here, each taking up our own crosses that we have been taught by the larger less kind culture and to bear those crosses *but not, heaven forbid, be defined by our crosses*, our shortcomings, the times we fall short. We are forgiven, but with forgiveness comes an obligation to try to do better, to love more, to be more kind, more welcoming, acting more like all people are our kin and loved by this amazing God. It's why we give of our time, our financial resources, our energies to this faith that Jesus taught his disciples and is still teaching us today. And, one of the best rewards we get when we give of ourselves is we simply feel-better-about-ourselves! We don't feel better because of money or power or fame or the color of our skin or anything about the privilege our culture gives us. No, we feel better about ourselves when we do good because that is really the true nature from God from which we were all born into. Amen.

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