

**Sermon for Sunday – March 19, 2023**  
**John 9:1-37**

**Prayer:** May the words of my mouth and the wonderings of our minds reveal your wisdom in our time, God of life and light. Amen

In my early years of church ministry, I regularly heard two comments after being introduced and identified as a minister and both were a bit hard to hear:

The first - "You don't look like a minister!"

I don't think the comment came because I didn't wear a clerical collar. My hunch is, that in the late 80s and early 90's women in ministry were still a rather new phenomenon.

I remember one afternoon answering the phone at the manse. Hello – and the gentleman on the other end of the phone said "Hi, can I speak to the minister please." I informed the caller that he was speaking to the minister. There was a long pause on the other end of the line. Then. "Well, I suppose you will do." "You don't look like a minister" was mostly about the fact I was not a man.

The second comment I often received, that didn't sit very well was: "You're too young to be a minister!" I remember being called to be with a family who were needing help to plan a funeral. This was a family who was a bit removed from the church, so I had not met them yet. I remember the grieving husband sitting in a big armchair facing away from the door that I had come through – his daughter introduced me to the room, "This is the minister, Debra. The grieving man got up, turned around to face me, and blurted out "you have got to be kidding". I received this observation for the better part of a decade, right up until the wrinkles started setting in.

I know that these comments were not given as an insult, but certain thoughts would flood my heart and mind upon hearing such statements:

*Maybe I am too young to serve in church ministry.*

*I'm terribly inexperienced and shouldn't be in this position.*

*I haven't garnered enough wisdom to go about this work.*

*No one will receive pastoral care from a woman and especially one who is "too young to be a minister."*

Each of us, at one point or another, are classified by our unique appearance, a quirky mannerism, or peculiar life circumstance. Many, if not most, of these externally received means of identification are unhelpful and, at their worst, become hurtful and debilitating. These means of identification reduce our "fearfully and wonderfully made" selves into a single trait. But we are so much more than that?

On this Fourth Sunday of Lent, we join with Jesus in meeting an individual who is given no name or self-provided biography.

The community, however, has ascribed certain qualities to him:

(1) the man is blind and has been so since birth,

(2) he and/or his family are notoriously sinful and

(3) he sits and begs for assistance around the streets of Jerusalem.

The community, including some of Jesus' closest followers, found it most convenient to classify this individual with prejudice and little - to no - empathy. This external identification was anything but gracious and redemptive.

My hunch is we have all taken a turn assuming things about others around us just as they have assumed things about us.

Jesus, saw the man in an entirely different light than the people around him. Jesus knew the man was not an outsider but rather one of God's children entitled to all the grace, love and healing that any child of God is entitled to. Jesus did not leave him out to dry, joining in on the prevalent gossip of the day, Jesus vowed to "do the works of God who sent him." As the story goes, Jesus proceeds to spit on the ground and creates a paste to put on the man's eyes and sends him to wash in the pool. The result - the man is no longer blind; he becomes new. Released perhaps from his lack of sight but also from the lack - in others - to see his humanity and rightful place in the family of God.

What if the only thing wrong about being blind is the way others treat you. Persons who are blind live full and joy filled lives - they just live life differently than sighted people. Persons who are deaf live beautiful, joy filled lives just differently than those who hear. Persons on the Autism spectrum live beautiful, joy filled lives just differently than those not on the spectrum.

What if the blindness that is cured, is not in the man born blind - but in those who - surround him - perhaps they are cured of their blindness - their inability to see this man's full beauty as God's beloved child.

What if in Jesus answer "neither this man nor his parents sinned; He was born blind so that God's work might be revealed in him. Jesus is saying he was born and God will be revealed in him! Just as God will be revealed in everyone. In the one born blind and the one who is deaf and the one on the spectrum and so on and so on.

God's work is revealed - not after healing but - now in who he is as he is. And who he is – is worthy of all the things that all God's children are entitled to love, healing, and community. God's work is revealed in this blind man and in everyone – in you and in me.

Through this encounter, Jesus invited the man to take on an identity of one who had experienced divine love. Perhaps healing of the man's physical blindness was an outward sign of a holistic transformation which the man experienced that day. No longer was this man required to live into the identity imposed upon him by a community who had no desire but to judge and condemn him – what if the healing was also about this man living into the fullness of his own life.

You would think that such an event would cause a community to celebrate; if anything, we might think that such a divine and transformative moment would excite and energize the faith community. But in our story - this kind of change is unsettling for those who make their meaning by placing labels and identities on others from a position of power and privilege. Members of the community and the religious leaders themselves started asking certain existential and practical questions and they made quick assumptions:

*If this man was healed on the Sabbath, then we must identify who broke the law!*

*If this man has truly been healed, how do we now regard him, and how do we regard his parents?*

*What does this say about everyone else we've already determined to be outside our favour?*

*What does this say about Jesus? What if his message of healing and new creation catches on?*

Those questions became too momentous for the religious leaders. The individual formerly known as “The Man Blind from Birth” poked too many holes in the establishment’s understanding of their own authority. There was no alternative but to throw the man out.

When Jesus finds out that the man was driven out of his community, he goes and finds him. The man didn’t fit into his community anymore because his community couldn’t find a place for someone who defied their carefully constructed categories and labels. I love that Jesus thinks; well then this guy who has been turfed out of his community – well that is just the kind of guy for me and what God is doing in the world. So Jesus goes and makes him a follower of his way. Jesus doesn’t check to see if the man looks like a follower, he doesn’t ask how old he is, or what other qualifications he might have to be a good disciple. Jesus simply asks: do you know who I am? And the man answers yep – I’m starting to get it but I have questions. Great. Jesus says: Then follow me.

The lesson that I take away from today's story is that it is not my job to assign God's presence in someone but rather to see and honour it in everyone I meet because it is already there.

And – perhaps the harder work – is to see the way Jesus looks at me. With eyes that see my wholeness, my perfect goodness, my beautiful reflection of God's heart – beyond my gender or age or ability or category.

To see ourselves as Jesus sees us – changes everything and we are made new, and we are called to live into the fullness of life.

May we have eyes to truly see.

Amen.