

Nurture!
3.26.17

John 9.1-41

During this season of Lent, we have been considering the covenant we make when we are baptized as United Methodists.

For the past few weeks we have been exploring our baptismal vows and striving to live into our baptismal calling. So far we have been challenged to:

> RENOUNCE the spiritual forces of wickedness...REJECT the evil powers of this world and REPENT of our sin.

> ACCEPT the freedom and power God gives us to overcome EVIL, INJUSTICE, OPPRESSION - IN WHATEVER forms they present themselves.

> CONFESS Jesus Christ as our Savior, Put your whole Trust in His Grace, and Promise to Serve Him as Lord in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races.

> COMMIT *yourself, according to the grace given in you, to be a faithful member of Christ's holy church and SERVE as Christ's representative in the world?*

This week, as we consider the story of Jesus restoring sight to the man born blind, we will reflect on the role of the community of faith in the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. In the baptismal covenant the community of faith plays a critical role. The gathered worshipping community is asked:

Will you nurture these persons in Christ's holy Church, that by your teaching and example, they may be guided to accept God's grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?

IWW do we, as a community of faith nurture one another in the Christian faith and life? How do we live into this baptismal vow and calling?

What can we learn about this aspect of our baptismal vow from this story?

Scripture summary. John 9.1-41

Jesus and His Disciples passed by a man born blind.

The Disciples wonder whose fault it is.

Jesus gave sight to the blind man.

His neighbors did not recognize the former blind beggar.

They took him to the Pharisees.

The Pharisees could not agree if this was the work of God, or the work of a sinner, AKA Jesus. (after all, the Blind man was healed on the Sabbath)

The Pharisees continued to interrogate the man.

Then, they called for his parents to verify that he had been born blind. And how he could see.

"He was born blind. Now he sees. He's old enough. Ask him."

Once again, the Pharisees pressed him for answers.
He kept with his story. *“I was blind, now I see.”*
They cursed him, claiming Jesus was a sinner.
He responded: *“only God could do what this Man did.”*
Angered, they kicked him out of the synagogue.
The man born blind could see, but more importantly, he could see the Light.

We find several communities in this story: 1) Jesus’ disciples, 2) the Blind man’s neighbors and family, 3) some Pharisees. Let’s take a look at how each of these communities responded to this man. To Nurture. Or not.

1) The **DISCIPLES** - were with Jesus when he was healed. They watched as Jesus made some mud from saliva and dirt. They observed how Jesus rubbed the mud on the blind man’s eyes. They listened to Jesus tell the blind man to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. “But,” says Chesser: “... the disciples don’t seem to be all that interested in the man regaining his sight. They are distracted by wanting to know the cause of the man’s blindness. They believe, like many, that suffering from a physical or mental ailment is punishment for sin. And so the *disciples wonder ... whether this man is blind because of his own sin, or because of the sins of his parents.*”

IWW did the Disciples, as a community, nurture this man in the faith? Did they have any sympathy for him as a human being, or was their main concern to determine who was to blame for his condition?

Have we ever found ourselves doing the same thing? Have we ever wondered how someone got into their present condition? (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

What parameters define our community? Who are the insiders and outsiders? Who is welcome and who is not?

It appears that the Disciples - the Community of Jesus’ closest followers - have made some assumptions about the man born blind. Obviously, he is blind for a reason. Either he sinned, or his parents did. So, it is his own fault. Therefore, it is okay to reject him. (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

2) The Blind man’s **NEIGHBORS** - those who have known him since birth - do not even recognize him. Some say he looks familiar, while others act as if they had never seen him. Even when the blind man says who he is, they are not completely convinced. Even the man’s own **FAMILY** seem to distance themselves from their son... especially when the Pharisees appear.

IWW did the Neighbors and Family, as a community, nurture this man in the faith? Could they see the positive changes in his life and celebrate with him, or did they not even accept the miracle?

It appears that the NEIGHBORS and FAMILY - the man’s community - do very little or nothing to nurture him in his faith. They seem to have more questions: how, where, who?

And amazingly enough, no one in this community actually celebrates this miraculous healing with the former blind beggar. (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

- 3) The **Pharisees** get hung up on a couple of issues. *This healing took place on the Sabbath. That makes the Healer a sinner, just like the blind man. Others claim that this could not take place without God's power.* At odds with each other, the Pharisees asked the healed man what he thought about the Man Who healed him. "He is a prophet" was the man's response - triggering a deeper sense of frustration and anger. *How did the Pharisees, as a community, nurture this man in the faith? Could they get past the Law of breaking the Sabbath, or was their main concern to do the right thing?* (Chesser)

When the Pharisees felt they were not making any headway in finding answers to their questions of the healing of the blind man, they just decided that the man was never blind. That it was just a fabricated story. So they called in his parents to verify the truth. While they were searching for something that would "discredit the story of the blind beggar" they discovered that the parents completely corroborated their son's story. *"He is our son. He was born blind. And now he can see. But we have no idea how it happened or who was involved. Since he is of age, though, you can ask him"* (Communicator's Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrickson, NT Vol 4; ch. 9 "New Eyes For Old"; pp. 167 - 177)

They defer to their son because *they don't want to be associated with Jesus.* They carefully avoid making any connection with Jesus or His Followers, for fear of being ostracized by their own faith community. (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

Still not satisfied with the answers they have heard, the **Pharisees** return their focus to *Jesus being a sinner, since He performed a miracle on the Sabbath.* The healing the man has received is not the work of Jesus, they claim; rather, it is the work of God.

They get so frustrated that they start playing games with the healed man, trying to confuse him into thinking that he was following "a false prophet, a sinner who doesn't even observe the Sabbath." In the end, the *blind man*, despite being healed, is *judged* to be a *sinner* who continues practicing a sinful lifestyle. They refuse to honor his testimony. They *reject* the *healing* that caused his blindness.

"You were born in sin, and are you trying to teach us?"

Fredrickson warns: "What a temptation it is for those of us who call ourselves 'Christian leaders' to fall back on our credentials - a seminary degree or an ordination certificate, our many years of Bible Study or the number of church offices we have held - when we are confronted and even embarrassed by the spontaneous, often naive, witness of a newly born disciple of Jesus." (Communicator's Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrickson, NT Vol 4; ch. 9 "New Eyes For Old"; pp. 167 - 177)

And so, in the end, the Pharisee Community did not welcome him or nurture him. In fact, they drove him out of town, "banishing him from the only community he has ever known." (Chesser)

4) **Jesus**, however, gets word of what has happened, seeks out the healed man, and **invites** him into the **community** of his **followers**. And perhaps for the first time in his life, *this man becomes part of a community that will actually nurture him in the faith.*
(Chesser)

Chesser: “this is the real miracle in this story. This is where our role as a community of faith in the baptismal covenant really gets some legs under it.”

“the **real power** in the story” she says, “is that the **man born blind- who had been judged to be a sinner and rejected by his community, and even his own family**, because of something that was beyond his control; who had suffered a lifetime of ostracism; and who had been reduced to earning a living by begging on the side of the road—*found not just healing, but grace, welcome, and even love, in the community of followers of Jesus Christ.*” (Chesser)

Will you nurture one another, in the Christian faith and life?

May “our communities of faith ... truly be places of ... welcome and nurture for all who pass through our doors. (May we) Open our eyes... to see people not with our own eyes, but with (God’s). (May we) Open our arms to welcome those who have been rejected or cast out by their communities and families. (May we) Open our hearts to be able to truly love those whom we have judged to be sinners. And (may we), ... by our teaching and example, (help) those whom (God) sends to (us) to be guided to accept God’s grace for themselves, profess their faith openly, and lead Christian lives. (Chesser)