

HERE IS AN ASTONISHING THING

The story / the event in the John passage is a narrative / a testimony about an encounter with the Divine. It is both a faith statement..... and a disbelief statement.

The story presents a man born blind who is able to see....., thanks to Jesus,and it reveals how he and those around him responded to his new his gift of sight.
The whole episode is a teaching event about God's touch that gives new vision,.... and... the reaction that gift had on others.

To clear the ground / to debunk common erroneous assumptions, Jesus clearly states that the man's blindness was not a consequence of sin.

Even today, we tend to think that beggars, panhandles and the poor deserve their lot in life, for various reasons, including laziness. And, we often treat those who are not like us differently, as less than we are.

His blindness was not a punishment for sin, just as we should not wonder about men that have hairy heads. Sin is not the reason for their un-evolved scalp. (Yet, I still wonder?)

A blind man simply can not see with his eyes, and that's it. He is still a man in every other way, and maybe more of man than some. ???

In addition, the reverse is true, too. We must not presume that we are favoured just because our limitations are not so obvious.

With that clarified, Jesus states the reason for the man receiving sight,.. and the miracle was NOT to debase or devalue the natural cadence / laws of life. Jesus didn't bring vision to all blind people. Blindness and such things happen. People get diseases, and some are lethal. This divine touch of sight does NOT alter the natural order in creation.

The reason for the miracle is presented in verse 3: so that the man... and others would experience God's involvement / God's presence / God's touch.

It was a gift of sight,.... and not just visible sight, but rather the opportunity to see God in the moment, through Jesus.

It was a teachable moment.

Teachable moments are those special occasions when we are open to receive new insight / new awareness.

Usually, emotions/ feelings are a factor.

Emotions can help open the door to discover or in contrast, personal feelings about a concept can lock the door to insight.

Absorbing facts / learning details is merely memorization.

Insight / new awareness comes when we are open and able to comprehend something new.... when we are willing to be changed.

People will say, “I heard that for years, but never understood until now.” The comprehension of the new insight is an eureka.

The man born blind was **touched** by Jesus. Jesus places his own saliva made mud on the man’s eyes and invites the man to believe by telling him to go and wash the mud off. He responds to the impossible, and he sees – his eyes see..... and he sees. He sees the divine touch in Jesus – a touch that gave him new awareness – new sight!

Those who knew him as a blind beggar couldn’t believe what had happened. The Pharisees got wind of the event, and questioned him, too.

The Pharisees regarded Jesus as a heretic, an iconoclast... and a sinner. Jesus didn’t follow the rules. Jesus didn’t fit into their mould / their expectation of what a prophet / a “divine” person should be like.

The Pharisees accused that man of being a “plant” / of being one of Jesus’ followers and of never have been blind.

So, they checked with the man’s parents, and put them on the hot seat, too.

The parents confirmed the blindness and that he was their son, but they refused to give an opinion on what happened because they were afraid of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees went back to the man who could see, and resume their inquisition.

They hammered away at him, trying to break him into renouncing his assertion that Jesus’ divine touch made him see.

In frustration the man responds, “Here is an astonishing thing!
You don’t know who he is / where he is, YET.... He Opened My Eyes.

In other words, I’ve seen him; I know; I’ve been touched by God through him, and so he must be the Messiah,... yet you guys the experts don’t believe.

The Pharisees berated him some more and drove the man away.

Jesus came to the seeing man’s rescue. Jesus confirmed to the man that he was “seeing” the “Son of God.” The seeing man “used his words”, and said “I believe.”

Nearby, the Pharisees were listening, and when confronted by Jesus, they refused to see. They remained in the dark.

It is terribly sad when we miss that precious opportunity to see.
It is terribly sad when refuse to open up to see the divine.
It is terribly sad when we don’t see / sense God’s touch.

It is most unfortunate when we block the opportunity for enlightenment / to avoid perceiving the world in a different light..... because I think God is in such wisdom

Those moments of awareness may arrive like seeing a sunset in a different way – a eureka after years of exposure or by witnessing others patiently model and teach a better way.

Those moments of awareness may be intentionally put before us, such as a prod to get our attention or even a bold confrontation.

The blind man and the Pharisees were confronted.

Regardless, of the method, invitations to see do happen, and I firmly believe they are usually orchestrated by God.

And typically, they come to us as a surprise or in surprising ways.

Last Sunday, the theme arose from Jesus confronting the Samaritan woman at the well, and that scenario truly was a surprise, especially for her.

Today's text is mostly a testimony, and so I will keep to that genre,... and emphatically declare that on many occasions God has confronted me with the opportunity to see.

For example, I've assisted refugees, the marginalised and impoverished and homeless people for many years. I began helping in the mid 1970s by volunteering at an inner city relief centre. Then a large group of Laotian refugees arrived, and I became very much involved with aiding a number of Laotian families.

Later, while I was at seminary, I volunteered at a homeless shelter, and much of my ministry, while pastoring my first Mennonite church, was with street people and the homeless. I was also part of a group of pastors that were reaching out and empowering illegal immigrants who were brought in from Honduras by a large chicken processing company.

All these people needed help. I wanted to help,.... and it made me feel good to help.

In hindsight, I think my attitude was a bit patronizing.

I was the able, the educated, the giver, the benefactor for the needy. I was trying to make those poor people's life a little better.

Then there was Debbie. She was homeless, except when she could find a man to give her shelter, at a cost. Two of three her children were already taken from her, and then painfully the government took her third. My church tried many ways to get her out from her terrible plight. We finally had her tested by the government. Her IQ was 3 points above the level to qualify for placement in special care facilities, and therefore her need for our generosity would not end. She was a poor soul, I thought.

Then one day, she came to me and presented me with a gift. [show]

She made this from beads and safety pins, and she wanted me to have it.

Suddenly, like a flash, my eyes were opened. I was not a benefactor, but the recipient. I was not superior to her. I was just another person living on this planet with her. We both were doing the best we can, and helping each other along the way.

I saw things and people differently from that point on, and I keep this in my office as a reminder. Her gift was a touch from God

I've experienced many such touches and prompts from God that invited me to open my eyes. In addition, there have been times when God has made God self very present, undeniably present.

Latest time was not long ago.

But, first I need to tell you about wind chimes.

I've acquired a deep fondness for wind chimes, in part because my mother liked wind chimes,.... and so did Leslie's mother.

When my mother died, I received her nice copper chimes, and I've enjoyed hearing them chime over the years.

At my ordination, a friend and fellow pastor, presented the charge to me, and he gave me a set of wind chimes. He used them as a simile, saying God's Spirit is like the wind. It may not be visible, but when God's Spirit moves, it can be experienced, just as the chimes reveal the presence of the wind. So, he told me that whenever the chimes sound, let them remind me of God's Spirit.

It was a nice analogy, and so were those chimes. I added them to my collection, and over the years, I think about what he said when I hear the wind blow through the chimes.

Okay,..... to my recent experience.

As most of you know, we've sold our house and we'll be moving later this month. Many of you also know, that this has not been an easy ordeal.

The concept / the dream of moving to an acreage actually began after my surgery a year ago. Life seemed a little shorter and more precious, and Leslie and I talked about pursuing our dream of living out, closer to nature. Yet, it didn't seem viable / affordable.

And, then our living situation became challenging, and even very uncomfortable.

Without going into details, architectural structures magnified a certain noise coming from our neighbour's yard to the point where we could no longer use our bed rooms. There was great anguish and frustration in all this. We slept in the basement until last fall when the cold and snow muted the sound enough.

Then, last October, while driving back from Blumenheim, I saw an acreage for sale. It was in a beautiful location, near the river. Later, we learned that it was the place where Anne Friesen was born, and knowing the history / the connection made it more appealing. The real estate market was dropping,

they wanted to move,..and so our offer was accepted. All we had to do was sell our house, with full disclosure of the sound situation..

Months went by, and by the beginning of March, I was becoming anxiously, agitated. I knew it would NOT be much longer until the snow melted, and I dreaded what that meant to our living conditions. Moreover, I was deeply afraid the owners of the acreage would accept a better offer, and all would be lost.

On Monday, March 7, God and I had a heart to heart conversation that lasted a long time, but I was the one doing most of the talking and protesting.

I **may** have made a few accusations and expressed some serious doubts, but I'm not saying I did. :)

Basically, I said, "Where are you God? Things are getting to the crisis point, and time is running out. Is this all a torturous ploy?"

That Friday, the 11th, someone came to see our house, and surprisingly, without asking any questions, she submitted an offer that evening.

It was below what we could consider.

We countered.

Saturday morning, we found out that the owners of the acreage accepted a better offer. We had until Monday afternoon to sell our house and close the deal, or lose it. That place by the river was our dream.

Arrangements and agreements were made. A house inspector came Monday morning; things fell into place, and 30 minutes before the deadline, we were able to say we'll buy it.....

My real estate agent said that he'd never, ever experienced such a thing—a buyer at just the right moment and everything happening, successfully, so quickly. He said **it was miracle**.

Yet, one big "if" remained, the lady buying our house was pre-approved by the bank; however, it would take a couple days to know for certain. In the mean time, we bought an acreage without knowing for certain if our house was sold. Anxiety was still high.

Wednesday evening, March 16 my agent called a little after 9:00 pm.

He said that he just received the official confirmation by fax that her mortgage was approved. The deal was done. It was going to happen. We were moving.

I felt Relief..... unbelievable relief.... and gratitude.

I walked outside on the front porch to take it all in. To just absorb the moment.

As I stood outside without a coat on, I suddenly heard the wonderful, delightful sound of wind chimes. In fact, the sound was unbelievably beautiful— the depth and harmony was beyond what I've ever experienced before, and they rang and rang. The sound was coming from my back yard.

I thought I was hallucinating.... or my mind was playing games with me.
So, I raced inside and told Leslie, "Come here quickly, hurry!"

When she was standing outside next to me, I asked her, "Do you hear that?".... fearing that she wouldn't.

She nodded and said, "Sure. I hear wind chimes. They sound really nice."

I replied, "**Leslie!** Anticipating our move, I packed away ALL of our wind chimes last fall. **We don't having any out. NOBODY** else has wind chimes either, unless they just bought them today."

Since then, we've had windy days, and I've walked the neighbourhood searching for chimes. There are NO wind chimes to be found, and none have been heard since then.

At that moment on Wednesday evening, my heart was in my throat.
The unbelievable sensation of God's divine touch was overwhelming my ability to comprehend.
I cannot adequately describe the feeling the feeling of keenly experiencing the presence of God.

Elated and dumbfounded, I walked into the house and said to God, "Why me? I'm nobody special. Why did I experience this?"

It was a teachable moment. The mud was washed from my eyes, and I understood. I could see.

God was giving me a gentle tap on the back of my head, [] saying, "**Hey..... don't you ever doubt that I'm present.**

**Don't you ever think that I've given up on you.
I'm here with you and always will be."**

God is love. God is ever present.

Live in that light!

And,..... that is truly an astonishing thing.