

**4 Lent Year A**  
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**Trinity Episcopal Church**  
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***Miracles Seen and Unseen***  
*1 Samuel 16: 1-13; John 9: 1-41*

In the name of God, seen and unseen. Amen.

The other morning, sitting in our local coffee shop, I watched a toddler doing what toddlers do – seeking attention – from a haggard man with shabby, stained clothing, lingering at the counter over a bottomless cup of coffee. Her mom whispered anxiously to her friend, “*What’s he doing in a family place like this? He’s probably nursing a hangover.*” I’d overheard enough to know that, with her husband away on a business trip, she was treating herself, a friend, and her two-year-old daughter to breakfast – and now this.

They got through the meal, but as she approached the cashier, disaster struck. The man smiled, her daughter squealed with delight, let go of her hand... and ran straight into the man’s surprised, open arms. Just as mom was about to scream for help, he turned to her with a tear in his eye, and said, “*Thank you for my best surprise I’ve had in years,*” and handed back her beaming girl. Then the mom’s tears began... because she realized she’d just witnessed a miracle.

Ever notice how often we pray for miracles, yet how blind we are when they actually happen? At first glance, I imagine I’d probably react just like that mom did. But watching that man’s face, I wondered, what did her toddler see in this teacher – in – disguise that her Mom and I didn’t?

Today’s gospel is a perfect sequel to Maddie’s sermon last Sunday, reminding us how judgment and prejudice blind us to miracles all around us. In Jesus’ time, people who were *physically* blind or otherwise disabled were seen as inferior, as sinners, responsible for their condition, and rejected by their community.

So Jesus picks the blind man to expose the moral blindness all around him, and to teach us that it’s precisely through our *woundedness* – not our accomplishments or strengths – that we become useful as God’s servants. “*He was born blind...*” Jesus says, “...so that God’s works might be revealed in him.”

Have you noticed how, in every one of his healing encounters, Jesus has two purposes – to heal the *individual* of an affliction, and to remove the *social stigma* attached to that affliction. It’s not enough to “fix” one person after another; Jesus wants to build a new community, what he calls a new “kingdom,” which welcomes all people, with and without limitations, to flourish. So watch what happens after the man is healed.

Instead of shouting: *“Alleluia! What a miracle! Thank God!”* the neighbors barrage the man with questions: *“Are you the same person who used to be blind?” “Who opened your eyes?” “Where is he now?”* No one asks him what it feels like to see colors, or people, or flowers, or the sky for the first time.

They’re so oblivious to what just happened, they remind me of Sherlock Holmes on a camping trip with Dr. Watson. The two pitch their tent and turn in, only to both wake up in the middle of the night. Holmes asks urgently: *“Watson, what do you observe?”* Ever dull, Watson replies: *“The Big Dipper, the Belt of Orion, and the Pleiades. And you, Holmes?”* Holmes replies: *“Good God, man, can’t you see that someone has stolen our tent?”*

In the same way, depending for their livelihood on the status quo, the religious leaders of Jesus’ time came to believe in a God who is so manageable, who operates in such predictable ways, and only through the proper channels, they can’t imagine an alternative. So, viewing the world through the eyes of fear rather than love, they condemn Jesus... and end up missing the whole point.

It’s only the formerly blind man who sees through this nonsense. Referring to Jesus, he says, *“I don’t know whether he’s a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”*

And that’s the second miracle. As one preacher put it, *“...a nobody from nowhere who was blind until a half – hour ago, just told the vestry they couldn’t see God if God bit them on the nose.”*<sup>i</sup>

In the end, the religious leaders’ real sin was refusing to open their hearts to the very unconventional ways that God works in the world, and thus blinding themselves to the gifts of those they marginalized. Their sin was seeing how someone looked, or what someone believed, and rejecting them out of hand, forgetting that this is just another beloved child of God in different garb.

Not unlike those opinion leaders today who see people who are poor, or sick, or disabled, refugees and immigrants, people of color, those with different religions or sexual orientations, as a vast cloud of sinners, responsible for the way society neglects or abuses them. They forget that every single person they ask us to hate or reject, just like those social rejects in Jesus’ time, has an extraordinary set of lessons to teach us about our own fears, our limitations, our flawed humanity.

So the good news is that God keeps inviting these most unlikely teachers into our lives – helping us, if we dare, to discover our common humanity, and to respond with love, rather than fear. All we need to do is to keep our hearts – and our eyes – open enough to the truth that each one of us, each beloved child of God, is born a miracle, *“... in whom,”* as Jesus puts it, *“God’s works might yet be revealed.”*

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<sup>i</sup> Taylor, B. B. (1999). *Home by Another Way*. Cambridge: Cowley Publications, pp. 75.