

More Than Sight

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Psalm 96

John 9:1-38

From the moment he stepped out of the Jordan River – Jesus began to strike a blow to what was then – the status quo. He broke rules, spoke out against the Law, went toe to toe with religious authorities, hung out with every kind of rejected person, and publicly flaunted his disdain for cultural norms.

If he were alive today, Jesus would be the guy who stands on the public square with a bullhorn, the guy who marches on Washington, the guy who writes letters to his senator. He's the guy who gives up a lucrative position in some big corporation to work with crack addicts, the guy who changes his entire life to move out west and live on a reservation to help Native Americans. He's the one whose not afraid to admit he stands shoulder to shoulder with every oppressed, marginalized, different from you and me person on the planet. He's that most annoying person who can't stop talking about justice for all and peace on earth.

Jesus is the guy who just took off running away - from the Temple because they were throwing stones at him – He's the guy who keeps on doing what others want him to stop doing. And in refusing to stop – even though it was the Sabbath – when no one was to do any thing that was considered work – didn't matter because the very next thing Jesus did was heal a man who was blind from birth.

Jesus lived at a time in history when things were changing. The turn of a century which was still young; when talk of the end times was very often the main topic of conversations. A time when the Jews were living as a minority people in a holy city which was no longer their own – when because they were watched and ruled by the Roman government, fear that their faith would be affected or diluted, made it a priority to hold tightly to the old traditions in order to protect that faith. And so it only stands to reason that this upstart from the backwoods of Nazareth was now considered a huge threat to that old adage – That's the way we've always done it.

But Jesus rejected that mantra straight away, because he was the new thing about which Isaiah spoke. A little dirt a little spit – a little mud rubbed onto the eyes, a dip in the local waters – and a blind man was now able to see what he had never seen before. Colors and faces, blue sky and green palm trees, shadows on the ground, moving clouds, rippling water, smiles, his own hands, the brightness of the sun – what

an amazing transformation. But this healing was about more than just sight. This was about making a man whole. This was about giving this man life. Because you see his blindness was seen as a sign that this man or his family were sinners – The blindness being his punishment, and sinners of this kind were kept on the outside looking in. The man's blindness was a sign of imperfection – and only the physically perfect were allowed full access to worship in Temple. Blindness made this man unclean – and as such he could not and would never be able to work, to fully participate in worship, the community, or in the congregation – friendships or acknowledgment by anyone in the city would be rare if at all. This man's blindness kept him in the bondage of loneliness, rejection, and ridicule. Blindness was the flaw, the blemish, the stain, that denied him the opportunity to know what it was like to be fully alive – and Jesus as we all know called for life – and living it abundantly. And abundant life was exactly what Jesus gave to a man who was blind from birth.

I said earlier that Jesus lived at a time in history when things were changing – and of course Jesus himself was the change agent – and he changed everything. And though tired as we are of hearing it, we are living in a time of change as well. So I am reading a book entitled, A New Kind of Christianity. As the church faces these changing challenges, the author asks, *What might be the one great purpose around which we can we rally...around what melody can the church harmonize, what will be our purpose:* His answer is simple. *The church exists to form Christ-like people – people of Christ-like love.* READ FROM PAGE 165....

When have you witnessed Humanity fully alive? I see humanity fully alive when people are engaged in something bigger than themselves – like mission – when church groups of teenagers and adults venture out on a mission trip – to fix up a widow's kitchen, to shore up a falling in porch, to give a family a bathroom with a real tub and running water. I see humanity fully alive when the widow offers something cold to drink, and when widow, teens and adults – once complete stranger hug one another and gather up in a tiny living room to pray together and thank God. I see humanity fully alive when people who live pretty cushy lives serve a meal to homeless men and women and then join them at table to share a meal and some conversation. We all witness humanity fully alive young and old, poor and rich, came together to carry food, medical supplies, clothing, bedding, and their prayers to victims of floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, fire or drought.

On more than one occasion Jesus was in the Temple - probably the place – the sanctuary he loved best – There he was comfortable, satisfied, relatively safe, and in communion with God. Maybe However, it's good that those righteous believers and Pharisees ran him out of the Temple – because that's not where the good Lord wanted

him to remain. Because Jesus' life-changing work was out in the trenches. Only out in the world would Jesus be able to share the very good news, only out there was he able to glorify God. Same is true for us.

Carrying on Christ's ministry – in the hope that our service will help people live abundantly – and always with Humanity fully alive as our vision - will not be accomplished inside – but only when we venture out there.