

Born to be Changed

March 2, 2008

(Lent 4 - Year A)

John 9: 1-41

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

In today's Gospel reading, which, compared with last week's Gospel reading, is probably the *second* longest Gospel reading I have ever heard in church,

We hear the story of the healing of the man who was born blind.

The writer of the Gospel of John makes it perfectly clear that the man did not become blind later in life, but he was born blind.

Jesus puts mud on the blind man's eyes and then he is healed, transformed, and changed.

Yet, no one in the story seems to share in the healed man's joy.

Everyone in the story is gripped with fear, fear of change.

The neighbors of the man seem a little put out that the blind beggar is not going to be begging anymore in his usual place.

The Pharisees are afraid that, now that the blind man had been healed, that the healed man will become more powerful than they are.

Even the parents of the man don't seem too happy, because they are too afraid about what the Pharisees will say about their son being healed on the Sabbath.

All of the people in the story seem to like it better when the blind man could not see.

All of the people in the story seem like they want the blind man to stay exactly the same way that he was when he was born.

The people in the story are afraid to be changed.

You might notice that I am wearing a different kind of stole today.

This purple stole was made and decorated by the women who attended the Women's Lenten Quiet Day yesterday morning.

Twenty-five women, including some women from St. Paul's and Holy

Spirit, gathered in our parish hall, to be led by the Rev. Susan Kennard, on a journey of prayer and scripture and discovery.

Now, I know that some of the women in our congregation had a little apprehension about attending a Quiet Day.

For weeks, I got questions that seemed to reveal a little anxiety.

Questions like:

What is a Quiet Day anyway?

And

Do we have to be quiet the whole morning?

However, I have heard raving reviews about the Quiet Day from the women who attended yesterday.

And the Quiet Day was a success because these women opened themselves up to a new experience.

They allowed themselves to be transformed.

Yesterday, they wrote their thoughts and prayer concerns onto 2 purple stoles.

The first stole is the one that I am wearing today.

And the other stole is being worn today by the Quiet Day leader, Susan Kennard, at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Bay City, Texas.

I am proud of the women who attended and of this stole.

Because this stole is a sign to me of the willingness of our women to experience something new.

Like the healed blind man, these 25 women were not afraid to be changed and transformed by a healing experience with Jesus.

Now, the man in the Gospel of John was born blind.

And I was born a Texan.

Not only was I born a Texan, but my ancestors came over on a boat from Germany directly to Galveston, Texas, in the 1850s.

My ancestors founded the first lumber mill in Texas, and then later settled in Houston in the 1880s.

I can proudly say that I am a fourth generation native Houstonian.

Especially since today is Texas Independence Day, I can say that I was truly born a Texan, with deep Texas roots.

Now my wife, Susan, was born in Kentucky.

And when we got engaged to be married, I told Susan that she had to be aware of one thing:

As long as we were married, we would never, ever, ever leave Texas.

However, in 1999, when I encountered a call by God to enter the priesthood, it became very obvious to me that - if I was going to make this huge career leap - then I wanted to attend the largest Episcopal seminary in the country.

Yet, that seminary is the Virginia Theological Seminary - which is, by the way, *not* in Texas.

When my college buddies heard that Jeff Fisher was contemplating leaving the land of his birth, they knew that something other-worldly was going on here.

I must admit that I was filled with anxiety, as were many people around me.

For the Pharisees, the parents and the neighbors of the man born blind, life would have been a lot easier, with a lot less anxiety, if the man would have just stayed blind.

And life would have been a lot easier, with a lot less anxiety, if I had just stayed in Texas and remained a CPA.

I will never forget the day that I bought new license plates from the Commonwealth of Virginia, and took the Texas license plates off of my car.

Like this purple stole, those Virginia license plates became a symbol, A symbol that God had changed me from the way I was when I was born.

The man in John's Gospel had been born blind.
But God changed him into a man who could see.

I had been born a Texan.
But God changed me, for a time, into a Virginian.

And during that time, God molded me in a way that would have never happened if I had stayed in the same place where I had been born.

Yet, the key is not to be afraid to let God mold us and change us into the kind of people that God has made us to be,
To transform us into the healed people that God intends for us to be.

Into what situation, into what circumstances, were you born?

Maybe you were born stubborn.

Yet, Jesus meets you on the road and wants to change you into a person who is more patient and less rigid.

The key is not to be afraid to let Jesus change you.

Maybe you were born into an unloving and cold family.

Yet, Jesus wants to change you into a person who is loving and warm.

The key is not to be afraid.

Maybe you were born with a predisposition to alcoholism.

Yet, Jesus wants to change you into a person who is sober.

The key is not to be afraid.

Sure, it is much easier to remain stubborn.

It is much easier to blame relationship problems on your family of origin.

It is much easier to have just one more drink.

But, Jesus meets us on the road and wants to heal us and change us from the people who we were when we were born.

Like the blind man's neighbors, like his parents, like the Pharisees, it can bring about anxiety when we are changed by Jesus Christ.

Some people do not like change and want to keep things just they way they have always been, even if that means keeping people blind to the power of transformation.

But, my friends, do not be afraid.

Do not be afraid to let Jesus muddy your life by making some mud and

putting it onto your eyes.
Do not be afraid to let Jesus heal you and transform you into a new
person.

For you were not born to be blind forever.
You were born, to be changed.

AMEN.

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