

Everywhere we go and look, we are hearing and seeing all sorts of things about “coronavirus:” Terms like “shelter at home,” “social distancing,” lessons in washing hands, and perhaps the strangest story I heard (I hope it’s just a joke) about thieves breaking into a safe, and all they found was... toilet paper! Along with all this are some rising emotions such as fear, anxiety, suspicion, and mistrust. (“When will this all end? Don’t stand so close to me in the checkout aisle, why is your cart so overflowing? Why Can’t Johnny come over to play? Will I get laid off soon and will I have a job when this is finally over?”) Oh yes, also there is much depression, especially among those who live alone, who are told to stay home, to NOT go to community gathering places.

Yes, strange times, with much sickness, sadness and fear, but we also look for evidences of goodness and grace. One church member wrote to the newspaper that we might try 24 hours without saying the word “corona virus” (oops, just said it). Another suggestion many of us do was “Go for a walk.” Lynn and I just walked the Marginal Way in Ogunquit, ME. But wouldn’t you know, people on the side of the trail were in a group discussing whether the virus had made it to the Samoan islands!

Perhaps we can find some hope or grace in the Gospel lesson suggested for this morning, the story of the “Man Born Blind”, in the

Gospel of John, Chapter 9. It is a long story with many subtleties, but I will lift up just a few ideas that may be helpful in these times. First of all, Jesus puts to rest the notion that suffering and sin are always connected. He says neither he nor his parents' sinned - that was not the reason or cause that this man was born blind. He actually gives no reason or causality, but simply says that given this circumstance, the works of God can be shown. I said in a letter to the church that a virus, like a cancer, is an equal opportunity bug. We cannot think about sin and punishment for any particular person or country; if the virus gets a start anywhere, it just does its best to replicate itself, to make more viruses. So we learn from Jesus that sometimes there is "no reason" (cause) for illness and suffering and certainly no direct correlation between suffering and sin. We have to accept sickness and trials as part of life and also accept that we cannot always know their cause or origin. Yet oftentimes we can see God working through people in times of crises.

That brings us to the Pharisees. In this story the Pharisees are busy focusing on sin, trying to point out everyone's faults. They call Jesus a sinner, for healing with clay on the Sabbath, for doing work on the Sabbath. Then they call the "man born blind" a sinner also, obviously born in sin, receiving this condition as a punishment.

But Jesus tells the Pharisees that their arrogant attitude, thinking they see all, know all, is really blindness, a “spiritual blindness.” I heard an unfortunate story of people belittling other people for their caution in staying away from a study group. Judging others and their decisions regarding safe distancing is not helpful. It is “Pharisaical,” which has come to mean self-righteous, judgmental, condescending, etc. Rather, HUMILITY is the way that Jesus teaches, and surely the man born blind exemplified humility, genuinely seeking help. In our current health crisis, our lack of answers has a leveling effect in society. We are all in the same boat... all seeking more knowledge, all doing our best to stay healthy.

Have you ever known a person born blind? Many of you know that I have, Ken Medema. Along with Jesus in our gospel story, I can say with without a doubt that his blindness had nothing to do with his parents’ sin, nor his sin. He had good, loving parents, showing him every opportunity and encouraging self-reliance (even taught him to water ski). And as far as HUMILITY and learning, his music and lyrics show this consistently; here is one song “Did you ever feel a sunrise? hear the coming of the dawn? Did you ever kneel on spring grass, when the winter snows are gone? Did you ever touch a

newborn baby, Isn't that a lovely way to see!" It is Ken's experience, Ken's way of finding God, Ken's story, as one born blind.

Likewise in the Gospel story, when the Pharisees interrogated the parents of the man who found healing, they say: Ask HIM! He can speak for himself. While the Pharisees were busy analyzing and judging, he simply told HIS story, as HE experienced it: He let Jesus put mud or clay on his eyes, and followed instructions to wash in a certain pool, and then began to see. And he called Jesus a "prophet." No need to make any statement of faith to be healed, He was simply open to the help of this itinerant healer, got healing and that is HIS story.

In these hard times, we may do well to take to heart that everyone has a unique story.... A story about the way this virus has given us hardship, and a related story about how we have found or seen God at work. Ken Medema had a concert this past week called "Evidences of Grace." He made up a great song on the spot, based on someone telling him a story about Grace which could be called: "Meeting you in the driveway!" (How we keep connections with neighbors, while maintaining "social distance"). Yes, many of us are waving and talking to neighbors even more than usual, as we all try to escape cabin fever.

When Ken Medema was in his early 30's he had a new awakening about his own hardships, being marginalized, socially

distanced, as one born blind, and an awakening about his way of knowing God, Christ, or Spirit. Ken told his story of seeing and hearing God, in a song called “I Saw You.” His story, his song, goes like this: (Ross sings the song)

I saw you, in the darkness,
I saw you, you were looking for me.
When you turned the light on,
My poor blind eyes began to see.

I heard you, in the silence.
I heard you, you were singing a song.
When I heard the music,
I just had to try to sing along.

And Oh so many times I’ve seen you before,
So many times I’ve heard your voice.
It seems like this time...
There was something much more;
This was the time I made the choice to follow you.

I know you in the light now.
I know you, and I’m beginning to see...

That you're opening my eyes,
And you are making a song... out of me,
You're making a song.... out of me.

In conclusion, we are all in this together, all in the same boat. We are suffering in some way. We all have blindness or blind spots. So let's be humble in our need, let's do away with judgment and blaming.

And we all have our own story to tell, about the evidences of God's grace that we see, about goodness and kindness that we see. And of course, let's be instruments of that love to others, especially the most vulnerable in our communities and families. Amen.