

Rev. Tasha L. Blackburn

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Blinded by the Light

John 9

There has been only one time in my life when I didn't have to worry about the dark. I was living outside Fairbanks, Alaska, working as a camp counselor and, in that place, the middle of the night has never been less threatening. A strange creak outside the door is no big deal when the night is more like dusk. Watching over 10-12 children as they slept was somehow less overwhelming when I could see their sleeping faces across the room. Even a rustle coming from the bushes during a 3am hike to the bathrooms was not scary when you can still see the sun above the horizon. It was an entire summer spent in light and it was wonderful. But the world is not often like this. Our lives are not some endless Alaskan summer where darkness never falls. We sometimes live in the dark.

And darkness itself perhaps isn't even the problem. It is what we become in the dark that is scary. In the dark we can lose our way. We become uncertain as to what is right and what is wrong. With every creak or rustle we jump to conclusions and that lead us to make mistakes we never would have made if we could see. In the dark our fears multiply until every shifting shadow becomes the boogeyman. Whether it has grown dark out our window or it has grown dark in our heart, it is a terrible thing to live in it. In our verses from John's gospel today we learn how awful it is to live in the dark, blind to the world. We learn that it is so awful it is something that requires healing. We also learn, as this story is told, that it is not the blind man who needs the healing.

Unlike other healing stories in the gospels, the blind man does not ask to be healed. Instead, he just happens to be walking nearby when Jesus' disciples point to him in morbid curiosity and ask, That blind man there, who lives in darkness, whose fault is that? Jesus cuts them off and declares that his blindness is no one's fault. Within the span of two short verses he has healed the man of his blindness. But the chapter doesn't end there. For more than thirty verses we read the debate and disagreements, the misunderstandings and fear that arise because Jesus has healed him. The Pharisees, through their hard-heartedness, show that they are as blind as a bat when it comes to God. They cannot see it, even when the one who could heal them is standing right in front of them. By the end of their encounter together, the Pharisees' question, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" oozes with irony.

If Jesus teaches us nothing else in this story he teaches us that the worst kind of darkness we can face in life is not the darkness life hands us but the darkness we bring upon ourselves. Some dark places are simply a part of our lives and no one is at fault. But when we close our eyes to what God might be doing in the world around us just because it doesn't fit what we would have God do, we intentionally blur our own vision. When we set aside relationships because we refuse to forgive or forget, we saddle ourselves with blinders. When we would rather have followed the rules than followed Christ, we turn the lights off altogether. And that kind of darkness is our own fault. Living in the darkness of our own making is, indeed, the worst of all. Our Ephesians reading reminds us that everything is exposed in the light and, standing in the light of Christ, the Pharisees' blindness is exposed. Jesus shows us that they were far more in need of healing than the blind man ever was. Though his darkness was obvious for the world to see, theirs was much greater.

No matter what kind of shadows we face in our own lives: the kind that knock on our door whether we want them there or not, or the kind we create when we slam the door shut, that shadow, that darkness, does not have to be the end of the story. For the Pharisees it was. They could not see their hand in front of their face they were so blind. They could not even see the Son of God when he was standing before their very eyes. They were blinded by the light. Darkness was not the end for the blind man though. He knew well its power but he does not succumb to it. As the story goes on his darkness fades so that he can see more and more. Until, finally, he sees clearly enough to know he has meet God's Son, his Savior.

How does he stave off the dark? He tells his story. Even when the Pharisees don't believe him, the man tells his story. Even when no one is converted by it, he tells his story. And, each time he tells it, each time he tells of what Jesus did for him, the darkness fades a little more. Whatever darkness we face, that darkness is not the end of our story. It is not even the most important part of our story. The most important part is what Jesus has done for us: that once we were in darkness but now, in Christ, we are in light. That is the story we need to tell. We may never convert anyone by telling it. People may not even believe us when we tell it. But we need to tell it. We need to so that our own darkness can be healed and we can live in the light. Amen