



Sleeper Awake

Ephesians 5:8-14; Psalm 23; John 9:1-41

Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (March 19, 2023)

Yvonne Shortt is an artist who uses grasses, clay, moss, and other natural materials to create beautiful sculptures of people's heads. Slowly over time Yvonne began losing her eyesight because of a rare genetic disease called Retinitis Pigmentosa. Her story is part of a documentary called Adapt-Ability by filmmaker James Robinson which highlights how her limitations are really a gift to her art.¹ Not being able to see well heightens her other senses and gives her greater compassion for the people she meets. When working on a project with clay Yvonne says, "I make a face of a little girl, and I make that face for hours until I feel her breathing."

The disciples ask Jesus, "Who sinned?" Their focus (and, sadly, ours) is on the sin or what appears to be broken, instead of on the potential hope of healing that God offers. Jesus is quick to point that out: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." When meeting those who are struggling, Jesus challenges the disciples away from fault finding and towards a hope that says, "God is still at work and creation is still happening. God's grace will be revealed through this person."

The Pharisees and teachers of the law seem to see only broken rules instead of broken people. God sets the rules, that is true, but people seem to set themselves up as interpreters of the rules and judges of God's will and final decision. Those higher up in power and resources claim the knowledge and wisdom to determine what is right and what is wrong. They seem more than content to set themselves as moral judges and standard bearers of a system that keeps feeding their arrogance and privilege. Moralistic judgments keep people in their places.

When an oppressive system is challenged, the system pushes back. Those who have interests in maintaining the status quo, look for distractions, loop-holes, or off-the-topic excuses not to relinquish power and control.

The Pharisees didn't care that the blind man was cured; they cared more about the rules to keep the system in place. This is a classic case of religious and political leaders wanting to have a say on how to regulate the health care system disregarding what the Physician's recommendations may be and what he might do. Do we see that happening today?

When the man born blind speaks the truth about what Jesus did, it doesn't fit with the Pharisees worldview. So, they lash out at him instead of giving praise and glory to God for his healing. They were quick to point out the problem with healing on the sabbath instead of being excited this man could now see. They maintain a cause-and-effect logic: their understanding of religion is moralistic and judgmental in nature, "We know this man is a sinner." Illness in their mind and according to this logic is evidence of sinfulness.

¹ <https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2022/09/yvonne-shortt-documentary/>

This becomes a way for them to give up on the man born blind and quickly dismiss his experience. Jesus reminds them that creation is ongoing, and that God isn't done with anyone yet. If they are so certain they know this man, and how God operates, then their own sin remains. Jesus teaches the disciples that presuming certainty about a person and their experience isn't his followers' mission. Today Jesus still calls his disciples to embrace healing that opens up endless possibilities for God's work to be revealed in the world.

After the poor fellow had been questioned, abandoned by his parents, and excommunicated, Jesus found him again. This time, Jesus explained that, unlike the others, the fellow was a successful scrutinizer. When Jesus assured him that he had encountered the "Son of Man," the man bowed down in worship while those who were doing the initial scrutinizing were found lacking.

May we hear this Gospel as an invitation to scrutinize our perspectives, sort through our presuppositions and see what should be discarded and what new insights might be hidden in unexpected, even unwanted places. Amen.