The Man Born Blind

Ask the right questions, for the right reason, in the right spirit, and truly, our eyes can be opened.

What do I mean ‘for the right reason, and in the right spirit”? Well, whether I picked it up in my family, or inherited the tendency from Adam, or came up with it on my own, sometimes instead of asking “Help me understand why you did that?”, I find myself blurting out “WHAT WERE YOU THINKING!?!”

The first approach is an effort to seek information we don’t really have, in a way that respects, and can even build a relationship. The blurted out approach just slams a door shut.

When the Pharisees asked, “How were your eyes opened? ” they weren’t really seeking understanding, new insight, or having a dialog within a relationship. That is clear from the follow-up response: “We know this man is not from God because he doesn’t keep the Sabbath.” If they could have just asked instead “Help us understand what you experienced,” or asked Jesus, “help us understand why you did this on the Sabbath?” the episode could have had a much different outcome.

For the right way to ask, and what can happen as a result, the man whose eyes were opened shows the way. He never asked “What are you trying to do, smearing mud on my eyes?!”. When Jesus asks, “Do you believe in the Son of Man,” the man who now could see asks, “Who is he sir, that I may believe in him.” Translate his example into our lives, we might ask, “Who are you Lord, so I might know and love and serve you?”

But back to the value of good questions in general, often asking the right question of a Gospel can truly open up what it means.

Anyone can see this Gospel starts with Jesus giving someone who was physically blind their physical eyesight. But as we watch and listen, it is not just these (pointing to my eyes) eyes that were opened. A much more precious sight was given.

First, the man only knows Jesus as “That man named Jesus.” Next, he can see that Jesus is a prophet. Moments later he is ready to defend Jesus as a man from God, and by the end of the day, he recognizes Jesus as his Lord, and worships him. All the questions back and forth led him to saving spiritual sight.

Now to a question of this Gospel that can help get to the heart of the matter. Why was it important for John to emphasize that the man was blind from birth? He keeps repeating that over and over. Couldn’t the story have worked just as well if the man had been blinded by an accident? I don’t think it is an accident that John makes a big deal about the man being blind from birth. The Pharisees make an ironic statement (and John loves irony as a way to make a point). They say: “You were born totally in sin, and you are trying to teach us?” Like they were somehow NOT born in sin, but he was? This is a real clue. Their arrogance led them to forget that they were born in sin too. As Jesus says, it wasn’t the man’s parent’s sin, or his. He was blind to illustrate the power of the Son, for the glory of God. Jesus can heal the blindness that we are all born with as a result of original sin, our human condition. We are all born with a capacity
to know and love God. We are born with a desire to see God. But because of sin, without God’s
grace, without an openness to Jesus opening our eyes, we risk living in deeper and deeper
darkness – like those who not only rejected Jesus, but eventually shouted for his crucifixion.

So why is being born blind so often repeated in this Gospel? Because the story is about us. We
can only truly see, and grow in God’s grace when we admit we are blind without Jesus opening
our eyes. We are sinners, called to be saints. Let Jesus open our eyes, and he will show the way.
Decide we can find the way on our own, and we will ever stumble in darkness.

Another way this spiritual wisdom has been described – we are all broken. God finds the way
into our heart through the cracks.

Let me conclude by offering three requests we might bring to prayer after hearing this Gospel.

1) “Lord, please help me see myself in truth. Help me to see what I am without you, and
what I can become with you.”

2) “Lord, help me recognize my blindness, or the blind spots that still remain in my life, and
open my eyes.”

3) “Who are you Lord? Please help me to see you more clearly. Help me to experience you
as the great healer, who can open up new worlds to me!”