



**Mennonite
Church**
Canada

Formation

Sermon

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Church: Home Street Mennonite

Date: April 3, 2011

Scripture Text: John 9:1-41

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Hardcore Christian

Walking in the Light that We Have

Not long ago I was having coffee with a friend, a woman of profound faith. I was explaining my growing sense of attachment and devotion to God, to the person of Jesus, and she said “You’re Hardcore Lynda, you’re a hardcore Christian.

This has stayed with me. The idea that I could be hardcore in my faith, passionate, resolute, able to be counted as an eager and willing disciple. It has its appeal. And, it brings with it trepidation. Because, of course, I know who I am. How deeply flawed.

John’s telling of the healing of the blind man is straight up good reading. Dramatic action that moves along in a gratifying way, easy story line, editorial comments provided with respect to things we could never figure out on our own. The dialogue is peppy and incisive. The action is easy to visualize.

The man is healed by Jesus, and then questioned by the religious leaders. After an intense argument the man is evicted from the temple and Jesus finds him. From the time of the man’s healing, Jesus has been out of the picture. Now, Jesus comes and finds the man.

And it is here I wish to stay for a bit. Because I believe that in this part of the story, we find a pivotal revelation of the nature of Jesus. The man has been evicted from the temple because he told the truth about who healed him. Different sources say different things about what the eviction from the temple will have meant for the healed man. Some say it meant the equivalent of excommunication from the entire Jewish faith community, others say the eviction could be temporary. In any event, it was some sort of

shunning, and the fear of it was enough to keep his parents from admitting to any knowledge of this Jesus, who has just healed their son.

But the healed man has a completely different response when asked who Jesus is. The religious leaders ask him repeatedly how Jesus healed him. And he answers them, over and over again, until finally he says: “I’ve told you over and over and you haven’t listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you eager to become his disciples?”

What temerity. Why is this man so cheeky, so reckless in the face of authority? Well, he was blind. Now he sees. Everything, EVERYTHING is different for him. He is in the throes of reckless abandon. The kind we usually see in people in love, in grief, terror, or in a rage. But, if you can believe it, it gets better. The leaders say; “You may be his disciple, but we’re disciples of Moses. We have no idea where this man even comes from.”

And the healed man answers them and says: “This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes. It’s well known that God isn’t at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does his will. That someone opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of-ever. If this man didn’t come from God, he wouldn’t be able to do anything!”

The healed man is throwing in their faces the teaching he has had at their feet. He says “Everyone knows that God works through godly people. How can you wonder where this man’s

power comes from? How can it come from anywhere except from God?"

And like the school yard bully who cannot win an argument except by force, they say; "You're nothing but dirt" and throw him out.

Resolute, passionate, hardcore, this healed man is all alone with his convictions and his changed life. Out on the street. And then, Jesus comes and finds him. And Jesus' opening question is typically disconcerting. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Well, the man had probably heard of the "Son of Man". The Jews were awaiting one such who would come to bring God's life and God's judgement.

Ever honest, the healed man says; "point him out to me, so that I can believe in him." Jesus says "you're looking at him, don't you recognize my voice?" Remember, the man has never seen Jesus. He has only heard his voice.

Once the man knows that his man in front of him is the same person who healed him, his answer is swift and absolute "Master, I believe." And he worshiped him.

Here's what we see in Jesus, what this part of the story reveals to us. Jesus comes to the man, as he comes to each one of us, in our times of separation, our times of reckoning, and asks us disconcerting questions. Do you believe in me? Are you my disciple? Who do you say that I am? Do you love me? Whom will you serve? Why do you weep? Why do you look for me in the tomb? Have you not heard? Have you not seen? Do you not know? It's been told you from the first. Do you not understand?

How do we answer these questions posed by our Lord?

The mystery of faith is that we have to have it, in order to see things. It is not inevitable that we will see. This miracle is so big, that you would think everyone would have to believe. But, apparently, not so. Further on in John's gospel, Jesus addresses this very problem when He says to the Jewish leaders, "I did tell you who I am, but you did not believe, the works I do in my Father's name testify to me." And again, "Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him."

So, we have a choice. We never have to believe, but without belief, we will never see.

Jesus tells the healed man that He is the light of the world. Goodness, the man born blind knows this, doesn't he? If ever there was a ready heart, it is he. But, the belief is still his choice. The

chapter shows us the progression of his understanding of Jesus' identity. First, he addresses him as "Rabbi", then, when questioned by the Pharisees, he says he is a "Prophet" but finally, once he sees Jesus, recognizes him as the one who healed him, he calls him "Master". "The first tentative step in walking by the world's light while it is day is walking by whatever light one has." (Johnson, pg 490).

This is not a faith healing. The man born blind did not believe in Jesus as "Master", the Christ, the Son of Man, when Jesus rubbed the mud on his eyes and sent him to wash. He did not believe in Christ's deity when he scrubbed the mud off in the Pool of Siloam and was instantly able to see. Sighted, and healed, he did not know who Jesus was. BUT, he walked in the light he had. He could only, resolutely and passionately tell the truth about who healed him and how. He did not deny it. It was too big. Even at risk of losing his place in his community, at temple, he still could not deny the one who had healed him. So, he walks forward with the light he has.

And Jesus meets him. Gives him the chance to see even more. Indeed, Jesus reveals himself fully to the man. "I am He."

This is how you become "hardcore". The path opens up before you and you take a few tentative steps in light that you have. Our faith increases by our doing. Not by our moaning about how God does not reveal Godself to us, nor how much more easily faith comes to others because they have received more blessings, or clearer signs, or a greater legacy of faith in their family. Faith comes to us by placing one foot in front of the other in God's good light.

We need to remember as well, that we are not alone on this journey of faith. I used to see Jesus arguing with the Pharisees and other religious leaders as a sort of never ending dialogue, one in which the Pharisees' blindness was contrasted against Jesus' brilliant miracles, parables, ground breaking soul shaking work amongst the oppressed, and that it really showcased arrogant stupidity - a cautionary tale, as it were.

And, I still think that, but now I see much more. Jesus is forever enjoining them to see Him for who He really is. He is badgering, hectoring, pleading, scolding, berating, all for the purpose of urging them to the light. He knows their blindness and its cause. Their reliance on their own standing, birth, track record, authority. He sees and understands the traps they have caught themselves in, and that is why he attacks those traps so vociferously. "God could make these stones into children of Abraham if he wanted." He is trying to rattle them so bad, that they really see

what is right in front of their eyes. He wants everyone to believe. Everyone. The Pharisees, all the ruling elite, everyone. God is not satisfied that ANY should be lost.

So, if faith comes from stepping out, from walking in whatever light we have, what does that actually look like?

There's a saying up on the wall outside a staff person's door at CMU. I read it each time I go by. It says; "When Jesus said 'Love your enemies'" he probably meant "Don't kill them."

We start with the agreed upon and the obvious. But we have to walk into it. We cannot turn aside and then wonder why more light was not given, why Christ did not reveal himself to us more fully.

We have been taught "love one another". Although even in this simple statement, we can find times when we would be genuinely confused as to what the loving action might be, for the most part, we really know. Do that. Do the thing that you know for sure to be loving. You'll get smarter about the grey areas as you go on. They'll look less grey as you mature, as you walk in the light.

We are taught to give a portion of what we have away. Again, we could get stuck in "how much exactly," or "to whom?" But ultimately, we know we need to give generously. So go on and give, and more understanding will be given as to how much and to whom. You won't get the insight with your wallet closed.

We are told to pray for those who hurt us. Seriously? Okay, through clenched teeth I pray for the people who have hurt me, whom I don't like. Secretly, I think God likes me better than them, and God sees that I am a nicer person, but I pray for them anyway.

And curiously enough, over days and weeks and months, something happens within me. I find myself able to imagine something good happening for those people when I pray, I almost want to hear good things are coming to their lives. And then, comes the day when I do want good in their lives. Me, selfish little me, I want what is best for them. I have walked in the light I have, into more light. And, as I wish them well, I am freed from the hideous yoke of hating them. I am free to love them and let the wrongs go.

We know we are supposed to study the Scripture, "Write it on our hearts, on our foreheads, on our door posts, teach it to our children as we rise up and as we lay down." We know. For some of us, this is the bit of light we have. No more. The intellectual understanding that we are supposed to read the Bible. No pull to do it, no reasonable

explanation for why, nothing to draw us there. Just the fact that it's supposed to be a good thing to do.

Well, do it. You won't understand why if you don't do it. You won't get more light if you don't use the light you've got. Scratching your head about the relevance of Scripture to your overly-busy modern driven life is not going to increase your understanding of the place for God's word in your life. You will not be convinced in a vacuum. That is not the nature of God's revelation to us, to anyone, ever. Go with what you know for sure is the right thing to do, and see what unfolds.

In my own torturous path to daily devotions, I have discovered some pretty alarming things. This Bible story has a beginning, and middle and yes, an end (of sorts). There is cohesion to the entire story. There is a prevailing theme (it's redemption), and the Old and New Testament are part of the same story. The history of the church, this church, is the story of Israel. We are Abraham's children. Every story in the Old Testament is our story. God has a plan. It is unfolding. The church is one part of a continuous whole. Jesus' life on earth was the literal and symbolic fulfillment of the prophecies and covenanting outlined in the Old Testament. When the Bible tells you a detail that seems irrelevant, it's not. Today's gospel story takes place during the Feast of the Tabernacle. That is relevant. The Jews understood this Feast, and the symbolic importance of Jesus telling them He was the Light of the world. None of these things are coincidences. This is a finely woven tapestry, so intricate and precise, a lifetime is not long enough to see how all the threads work to form the whole. But, they do. We do not have slapdash, bizarre, unthinking faith. We have an elegant and eloquent story of God's love and redemption written down for us to understand and ponder.

But, if we don't read it, and just have casual encounters with the Scripture on Sunday mornings, it will continue to seem disjointed, unlikely, and slightly offensive to our "superior intelligences." It is only in learning what the Scripture actually says, what it actually is, that it takes shape before our eyes. We see, but only because we have walked faithful to the light we have had.

We are called to be Hardcore Christians. Our Master meets us along the way, intercepts us when we stumble, alone, asks us if we love Him, and reveals Himself to us as we follow the light we have. We can be passionate, resolute, eager and willing disciples. Our faith will grow as we act. We will be met by our Lord. These promises are sure. Amen

