

Sermon notes: March 19, 2023

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Focus: John's encounter stories: this week - Man healed of blindness

This Sunday, the Gospel reading will take the form of a "reader theater." This theater is a way to present a biblical text with different voices. It is especially helpful with long narratives like the story of the man born blind. When you hear it, you are *supposed* to think it is humorous. The story pokes fun at people who get mad when good things happen to the weak. In this case, the good thing (healed blindness) does not fit their predetermined narrative (healing on the sabbath is bad, and this rogue healing might lessen the powerful's influence).

The man born blind seems to be having fun with his new set of eyes and has no desire to go back into darkness. He seems impervious to letting anyone make him feel bad. I find his willingness to mess with the Pharisees almost as compelling as the actual healing. Personally, I have seen a few miraculous healings for which I give thanks to God. But for the vast majority of us, our ailments stick to us like velcro. The everyday miracle occurs when people make room for and adapt to those who struggle (all of us at some point). The enduring miracle occurs when our communal adaptations help the weak function without feeling so weak.

We are much better off trying to figure out how to carry each other's burdens than we are trying to beat away weakness in our midst. Long ago, I was in a faith community that was very harsh toward weakness. It's your fault if everything does not work flawlessly. The logic: You don't have enough faith, so try harder, pray more and feel worse.

I am delighted to be at St. Timothy's because we are trying to be a community where the weak, the strong, the broken and the whole have equal footing. I think this is especially pertinent in light of the Discovery Counseling Center coming to St. Timothy's to do a presentation on depression and mental health. Some things like mental health aren't as easy to see as paraplegia but need (maybe even) more accommodation.

The great equalizer - intrinsic value Seeing intrinsic value in others is a profound act of love, maybe even a miracle. Do you love somebody just because they are alive? You are very close to the way Jesus loved the world. Personally, I am forever reaffirming my own value as non-negotiable. Ana Marie Cox is a political columnist, alcoholic and depressive. She found her intrinsic value in accepting that she simply exists. She said in a podcast panel discussion:

I think a big part of my recovery was actually divorcing myself from my work to a certain extent and to feel like I had value if I never wrote another thing in my life, if I never (pause)... the nods are making me feel better... You know if I just continued to exist my value on this planet would be as much as it would be if I wrote another book (applause) that's true for every single person in this room. <https://www.hilariousworld.org/episode/2018/10/29/the-hilarious-night-of-depression> (start at Minute 35:20)

We are breathing, lovely beings - full stop. Loving the weak in our midst helps us love the weak in ourselves. We all become stronger as a result.

Making room for disability has positive outcomes. I suspect most of us think helping people with disabilities is a noble thing to do, but it's unrealistic to help *every* disabled person so the logic goes. Giving a wheelchair is good, but not as enduring as changing a physical structure where anyone who enters does so without special help.

Midway through seminary, I went to an interdenominational preaching group. One night we went out to dinner. One of our participants was in a wheelchair. The party room was on the second floor (no elevator). We were all willing to carry him up, but he refused. He insisted that we go to a restaurant where he could enter like the rest of us. It was *very* uncomfortable, but his demand for equal access resonates with me today.

I want to suggest that helping people with disabilities (physical or mental) helps us all. When we create a world where disability is less of an obstacle to living a full life, we all have a better world. Many accommodations that started for the physically disabled are now part of regular life that benefits everyone. Curb cuts and electric toothbrushes were intended to help those with physical limitations. I wonder what ways we could apply similar effort to mental health - thank you Discovery Counseling Center.

Jesus He was always lifting up the broken. He was **not** blessing the broken with crumbs so that they would forever be dependent on him. He did just the opposite: In him, the weak found enduring strength. In him, the broken found enduring resilience.

Tidbits that I may also mention in the sermon

1. Margaret of Castello was rejected by her parents. She turned her poverty and disability into a superpower.
2. The difference between equality, equity, and justice
3. Finally, my favorite anti-ableist icon - The island of misfit toys. **Todd**