THE NEW SHOFAR

Don't shine so that others may see you. Shine so that though you others may see Him. C.S.Lewis

March 15th

They cast him out of the Temple; the Lord of the Temple found him.

This story from John's Gospel is long and detailed and it is a shame if we cut out bits to keep it short. One thing that stands out is the discussion of blindness – its causes, its cures and whose blindness remains. Jesus and the disciples see the man, blind from birth and the disciples want to know whose ***fault*** his blindness is. Note the question they're asking – was this his fault or the fault of his parents? In other words, did this man commit some sin, while he was still inside his mother's womb that caused him to be born blind? Believing such a sin was possible made it a reasonable question at the time.

The disciples asking this question of Jesus is the start of a multi-part story here. Jesus tells his listeners that neither the man nor his parents had ***caused*** his problem – meaning that their entire line of questioning was wrong. The way the Pharisees and others were thinking was incorrect and they needed to see things differently. The religious leaders were not going to accept that. They knew how God worked and were not about to let this upstart from Nazareth teach something different. He was blind so that ***you*** can be made to see**.** Now open your eyes and watch this is the challenge thrown down to them.

One man's law-breaking work is another man's missionary activity

Jesus spits in the dirt and creates mud to put on the man's eyes – the accepted medical action at the time. It is this act – spitting in the dirt and rubbing mud on the man's eyes that causes Jesus to run afoul of the Pharisees in this story. Remember that John tells us it was the Sabbath. And on the Sabbath one was allowed to do *no* work at all. Jesus' mixing dirt and saliva and spreading it on the man's eyelids was *work*. Had Jesus just sat still and told the man that his sight had been restored, he would not be in trouble.

The man refuses to condemn Jesus as a sinner. All he knew was that one day he was blind and the next he could see. But the Pharisees invoke the name of Moses – the chief cornerstone of their faith – and tell the man that they have no idea where Jesus comes from, but they knew one thing: he was a sinner. So, we ask … who was blind?

The Pharisees, in this story and others, represented the stiff-necked, change-resistant people of Israel (and Christianity) who, no matter what they witnessed or heard told, remained blind to the Good News of Christ Jesus. By this time in John's story, Jesus has been travelling around the region for some time and has performed a dozen or so miracles, including changing water into wine, healing people of various diseases and feeding 5,000 with a few fish and loaves of bread. There had been numerous opportunities for the Pharisees to take a look at Him and discern for themselves whether they thought He was the Incarnation of God, or just a political messiah. But

each time they looked, they saw nothing – they saw with the eyes of religious authority, with an absolute certainty that their way was the only way God worked and all other ways were wrong. They did not dare to think that God would act in ways that we did not expect or even understand. Who's blind? The Pharisees in this story, in their eternal hunt to root out sinfulness, committed the bigger sin and in so doing point out for us the dangers of being blind to the myriad ways of God.

God is at work. Can I see the divine hand wherever it is at work?

The question to ask is not 'what if it is not God and I believe that it is' but '***What if it is God and I believe that it is not***?' That is the one question the Pharisees forgot to ask. They were so sure of everything – that God did not work on Sundays, that Moses was God's only spokesman, that anyone born blind had to be a sinner, and ditto for anyone who broke the Sabbath; that God did not work through sinners, that God did not work on sinners, and that furthermore no one could teach them anything.

Thanks be to God that today those Pharisees are no longer around! Those people who were faced with the signs and wonders of God Incarnate in their lives and yet could not see who and what Jesus was because they were blind to the possible of God doing new things, different and frightening things. They were scared, unwilling to let go of the anchors of religion that had given them so much security in the past.

We ***all*** have our little pharisaical blind spots. If we should look into our hearts, if we allow Jesus – the light of life – to shine on us, and we can examine our lives and look to see where we act pharisaically, (ie not being willing to see God where the divine love is already at work especially in and through others), we can see that this blindness affects everyone. The blind man came to see both physically and spiritually because he, in his need, was open to the possibility of God working in him to call forth a new man.

Are we missing all that God is doing in and around my life?

It is a question we need to ask almost daily: What if this thing, this person ***IS*** God at work and I do not believe? That should be a little scary for us to face. We are good people. We try to follow the rules and get a handle on what it is God wants from us. We try and struggle to do the right things, so we are going to struggle when someone wants to convince us that some completely different thing might *also* be from God. And that's the important thing here. God is – both/and – not either/or.

The Pharisees in this story were not wrong for being the teachers and protectors of Jewish law. Most of them were probably very good and devout men who spent a lifetime devoted to their faith and trying to keep it pure. BUT … when Jesus, this brand-new picture of God in the world came along, they closed the eyes of their hearts – they figuratively plucked out their own eyes – rather than see that even as their faith went along, something new could *also* be happening in the interaction between God and humanity. "What if it ***IS*** God and I don't believe?" Who's blind now?

If our Lent-Easter celebrations call forth anything substantial from us, it is surely a willingness to explore the reality that God is calling us to something new, speaking to us in ways we need to hear, to which we need to respond, for the sake of the world.