

“Where’s the Joy?”

John 9:1-41

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I recently visited Harold Campbell. He is one of our finest members and lives in a nearby nursing home. You recall that a few years ago, Harold lost his eyesight due to an accident. This has not dampened his spirits, though. He is still the same delightful person we all knew.

“One of these days my sight will return,” he tells me when I visit him. “I hope so, Harold, and if it does, we’ll throw the biggest party you have ever experienced,” I tell him each time. “I’ll be there,” he replies with a grin on his face.

Why weren’t the people in the story recorded in John 9:1-41 throwing a party for the blind man that Jesus healed? Why weren’t they celebrating? There were several reasons, I suppose.

His neighbors were in denial, refusing to believe he was the same man they had known for years as a blind beggar. The religious leaders were on a mission to find out how and when this miracle took place. Even his parents were filled with fear of the authorities more than joy over their son’s healing and seemed to abandon him. What’s going on? Where’s the joy?

It is easy to see that the reaction to this miracle is the focus of this story. John’s account of the miracle itself is brief. The response to it, on the other hand, is rather lengthy.

Why did John craft the story in this manner? What message was he sending to his readers? I think he was trying to help them understand how to live out their faith and become the presence of Christ in a broken world.

His perspective was quite different from what other religious leaders taught and modeled, however. They emphasized following rules, supporting tradition and obeying authority. John placed his priorities elsewhere as this story indicates. They focused more upon helping people that were suffering. For John, nothing was more important.

So, what does this tell us about what it means to be a people of faith and the presence of Christ in a broken world? Let me share some ideas for you to consider.

People of faith in a broken world are sensitive to the needs of others and respond to them. Speaking of Jesus, John wrote, “As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned. He was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.’ He went and washed and came back able to see” John 9:1-7.

I like the way John describes Jesus’ compassionate gaze upon this blind beggar. “As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.” John makes note of the fact that Jesus did not merely glance at this man and go on his way. Neither did he use him as an object lesson to explain the source of evil, as the disciples wanted him to do. He paused and looked at him with sensitive, caring eyes. He looked beyond the surface or even the reason for his ailment to see a man that had struggled with blindness all his life. So touched was Jesus with this man’s plight, he stopped to help him.

It was as if Jesus was recreating him, or at least his eyes, with the mud placed upon them. Something had gone wrong, terribly wrong, when he was in the womb and Jesus was correcting it.

Our world is filled with struggling people. Some have wrestled with these problems all their lives and have grown weary or given up hope. What a difference it makes when someone notices, offering words of encouragement and kind deeds.

People of faith know this. This is why they see what others ignore or often overlook, responding with compassion and making hope visible. They focus attention away from why someone is suffering to what can be done to alleviate the suffering. They are people of action.

People of faith also encourage those that are helping others and offer their assistance. What is missing in this story? For me, it is the questions the Pharisees never asked. They asked plenty, that's for sure. "Who healed you? When and how did he do it? Why are you, a sinner, trying to teach us? Surely we are not blind, are we?" Yes, they asked lots of questions. I wish they had asked these, though.

"Jesus, what can we do to help you? We have so many people that are suffering and our abilities are limited. It is obvious that you can do far more than we can. Show us how we can partner with you to change the lives of the wounded and weary."

Why didn't they approach Jesus in humility and offer their assistance? Could it be that helping others was not their major concern? Instead, maintaining power and control over people were, along with feeding their addiction to comfort and attention.

I have a friend that says, "I am for anyone that is building a better world." He notices what people do to help others, encourages them and often asks what he can do to assist them. I believe this is what people of faith in Christ do.

Along with this, people of faith encourage others to share their personal experiences with Christ and share their own stories, too. I think one reason John wrote about this miracle was to encourage his readers to do what the healed man did, tell their story. Look at how often this man did it. He shared his story with his neighbors and twice with the religious authorities. Perhaps the most memorable line in his testimony came when the Pharisees were grilling him and trying to get him to discredit Jesus. He responded by saying, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

What do you know that needs to be shared with family and friends? What changes have occurred in your life that you need to share? What difference has Jesus made in the way you live? What role does faith play in the way you approach life's challenges or relate to others?

Whose story do you need to listen to along your way? What insights from their journey could shed light upon your own? I think one point John is emphasizing in this text is that people of faith are storytellers and good listeners.

When they hear that something good has happened to others, they celebrate with them. It appears that the Pharisees could not celebrate with this healed man and his family because none of the attention was upon them. They were completely out of control and out of the limelight. They were in no mood to celebrate, but condemn and criticize. How tragic.

Do you know people like this? Are you one of them? Do you struggle to celebrate others' good fortune or the changes they have made in their lives? People of faith are not jealous or begrudging. They celebrate with grateful hearts and shed tears of joys when others overcome life's greatest struggles.

People of faith create community for the disenfranchised. If you notice in this story, Jesus exits the stage after the miracle is performed. When does he return? He comes back after he hears that the Pharisees have thrown the healed man out of the temple. He finds him to let him know that he is still a part of the family of faith and not alone in this world.

People of faith search for those that have been rejected by others, especially religious leaders. They provide a safe place for them to fall, embrace them and bind their wounds.

People of faith seek to identify their blind spots and overcome their faults. When Jesus told the healed man that he had come to open the eyes of the blind, the Pharisees standing close enough to hear him remarked, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" I don't think it occurred to them that they had blind spots, do you?

Let's not be too hard on them, though. I only need to look in a mirror to find someone with too many blind spots to count.

I believe John reminds us that people of faith are humble and teachable. They are never too old to learn or too set in their ways to change. They welcome into their lives anyone that can open their eyes to new understandings and are grateful for every person that helps focus their vision.

Are you a person of faith, at least the kind of faith that John describes? Does this sound like the kind of person you would like to be and influence others to become? This is how we describe faith at Smoke Rise and what we try to model. Join us on this journey and tell us your story as we share ours.