

(Preceded by the skit "Lamp-O-Rama" by Daniel Wray, from the book *Service with a Smile*, Meriwether Publishing, 1998)

The clueless customer in this little skit makes me think of the Pharisees we met in our gospel reading for today. You'll remember that Jesus has given sight to a man blind from birth. You'd think this would be a cause for rejoicing, but the Pharisees aren't too pleased. Jesus did this on the Sabbath. In doing so he broke two of the rules about the Sabbath. One was healing someone. Healing was considered work, and if you could do it on the Sabbath you could do it on the day after the Sabbath too. And secondly, Jesus gives the blind man sight by first making mud. Literally he kneaded the mud. Kneading was one of 39 activities forbidden on the Sabbath.

From the Pharisees point of view, no truly good person would break Sabbath laws like this. This man's blindness wasn't a crisis. He's been blind from birth. We don't know how old he is but we know he's an adult. One day more being blind wasn't going to hurt anyone.

So they bring the blind man in for questioning. They figure he's faking it. Perhaps this was all some ploy on the part of the disciples to make Jesus look good. But of course lots of people know and recognize this blind man. He himself attests to the fact that he's been blind since birth.

The Pharisees become frustrated. There has to be some foul play somewhere in this. They're on a witch hunt. Notice this little detail: did the blind man ask to be healed? Does he cry out, "Jesus help me, I'm blind?" Was he even a beggar? Nope. The man never actually asks Jesus to heal him. Jesus just sees that he's blind and heals him. Thus, the Pharisees can't even pin guilt on him that he was asking to be healed on the Sabbath. This formerly blind man is completely and totally innocent.

But, not deterred, the Pharisees bring in his parents. They give the same story. Yes, he was born blind. And yes, they are innocent of it all. They also ignorantly put in a little jab, "...we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will

“speak for himself.” Of course, they just got done asking him – or more like interrogating him.

They bring him back and question him again. He replies with what I consider to be one of the funniest little responses in the Bible. They ask, “How did he open your eyes?” He replies, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples?”

Um, no they don't! And don't overlook the subtle irony of what he says. By the end of the gospel reading the Pharisees ask Jesus, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” And we chortle, yes, you are blind. And not only blind. You are deaf too because you can't hear what the once-blind-but-now-seeing man said to you either! Yes, the Pharisees are looking a lot like the customer in the skit.

Notice the reversal that happens with this account. The Pharisees are getting blinder and deafer by the minute. The blind man is seeing and hearing better every moment.

There's lots of things do delve into with this gospel reading but there's another subtle but very meaningful piece. The gospel writer John likes to draw on the book of Genesis for meaning. You know well that Genesis begins with the words, "In the beginning..." John's gospel also begins, "In the beginning..." You'll also remember the whole Garden of Eden story in Genesis. Adam and Eve are living there and God is the gardener with them. And how does John shape the resurrection story on Easter? Jesus' tomb is set in a garden and when Mary Magdalene first sees the risen Jesus she mistakes him for... who else but the gardener! Of course she's actually quite right on one level.

We find more Genesis parallels in our gospel reading. Our translations miss some of it as they attempt to make it good English grammar. More literally it starts off, "As [Jesus] walked along, he saw human blind from birth." The Greek does not say, "He saw a man."

The disciples immediately bring sin into the situation, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" The Garden of Eden story is about sin.

Also Jesus replies, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day..." How does the first creation account in Genesis go? God works in the days. Then God rests.

So we have: human, sin, work, and days making parallels with Genesis and creation, and that sets us up for the real theological teaching. What does God do when Adam and Eve sin? He starts cursing them. God curses the serpent. God curses the woman. God curses the man. And always overlooked these days, the final curse: God curses the ground.

What does Jesus do in verse 6? He spits on the ground and kneads it into mud and spreads the mud on the man's eyes.

Perhaps it is a disgusting image to us, and a really weird way to cure blindness, but let's not overlook the power of this moment. It is Jesus undoing the curse God called upon the ground in Genesis. What was cursed is now being used for healing.

The book of Genesis reads like every time humanity does something it screws up worse and worse. By the time you've read to the end of the Gospel of John, God has reversed every one of those screw-ups. That is the Gospel of John at its deepest and most profound.

Open your eyes. Open your ears to what God is doing. The cursed condition of the world is over. No, things are far from perfect, but your relationship with God is restored. It is God's work for you. Enjoy wholeness in your Lord. Amen