**4 Lent A (Embrace the Question…)** Pastor Randy Gehring
Our Savior’s Lutheran Church 22 March 2020
Text: John 9:1-41

# The Vision of Faith

## I. Introduction

* What happens when we ask the wrong question?
* Luther Seminary professor, Rolf Jacobson –
* a man who has been confined to a wheelchair since childhood
* because cancer forced the amputation of both of his legs –
* remembers his mother being asked when he was a child,
* “Don’t you feel guilty for not having fed your son foods that were higher in cancer-fighting anti-oxidants?”
* This fault-finding question is not unlike the one asked in the story from John,
* “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”
* And it’s not unlike questions I’ve heard the past week or so as we continue to live through this very real threat of COVID-19,
* questions that try to place blame for this worldwide scourge
* on the Chinese, or the anti-Trump liberal agenda, or even God,
* who, it is claimed by some, is in the process of meting out God’s wrath and justice upon an unfaithful generation.
* Questions like these, though, come from a closed heart.
* They are not questions that seek understanding or a relationship;
* rather they are seeking justification of a conclusion already drawn.
* In the process, they reveal a crippling fear, the limits of human understanding, and the lack of hope in anything beyond ourselves.

## II. The Paralysis of Fear

* Dr. Melinda Quivik, whom I met when I was an intern pastor at Gold Hill Lutheran Church in Butte, MT –
* once home to the largest open pit copper mine in the world –
* relates the darkness of fear to what it’s like when you visit an underground mine and suddenly the guide turns off all the lights:
* you become entirely oriented to yourself, she writes – the clammy humidity on your skin, the now audible and palpable beating of your heart;
* you can no longer see anyone else in your group;
* you alone are important – there is no larger picture;
* and you become focused on the moment, on temporal safety.
* Fear has a way of robbing us of our ability to see beyond ourselves, to actually see ourselves as part of a larger whole,
* dependent and interdependent on those around us,
* linked inextricably with all of creation.
* The questions the Pharisees ask in this story about the man who was healed of his blindness by Jesus
* reveal the fear of those whose perspective is limited by unbelief,
* who refuse to entertain the notion that their worldview may not be big enough:
* “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”
* “How were your eyes opened?”
* “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?”
* “What do you say about him?”
* “How is it that your son now sees?”
* Again, “How did he open your eyes?”
* “You were born a sinner, and are you trying to teach us?”
* “Surely we are not blind, are we?”
* These are the questions of people whose minds are already made up,
* who have no interest in gaining new understanding,
* who merely want to justify themselves,
* and whose fear of uncertainty, of not knowing all the answers,
* compels them to cling to what they think they already know, to what they can actually feel, to what they can see and explain.

## III. Jesus’ Response to Fear

* But when Jesus shows up, everything changes.
* The Light of the world creates a new possibility in a world ruled by darkness and fear.
* A man who has lived in blindness all his life receives his sight and suddenly his whole perspective changes.
* He can now see others, he can see himself in relation to that community,
* and his picture of the world is now far bigger than it ever was.
* Even if he can’t explain how he now sees, he is able to step into an unknowable future with newfound confidence
* because his existence is now linked to one who is powerful enough to heal with merely water and a word.
* And the question Jesus asks him draws him close: “Do you believe in me?”

## IV. What If…

* What if, in the midst of this COVID-19 outbreak, we are asking all the wrong questions
* because the darkness of our fear is shrouding the vision of our faith?
* Gurpreet Gill reflected on this very question a little over a week ago in a piece she entitled “What if…”
* Now hers is not necessarily a Christian perspective, but it is a human perspective and, as such, it deserves our attention.
* She writes:
* There is so much fear, and perhaps rightfully so, about COVID-19.
* And, what if…
* If we subscribe to the philosophy that life is always working out for us,
* that there is an intelligence far greater than humans at work…
* That all is interconnected.
* What if…
* the virus is here to help us?
* To reset.
To remember.
* What is truly important.
* [Like] reconnecting with family and community.
* [Like] reducing travel so that the environment, the skies, the air, our lungs all get a break…
* [What if the virus is] an invitation to turn inwards — a deep meditation — rather than the usual extroverted going out to self-soothe.
* [An invitation] to reconnect with self — what is really important to me?
* [What if the virus is] a reset economically
* [that helps us actually see] the working poor, the lack of healthcare access for over 30 million in the US, the need for paid sick leave…
* [What if the virus is helping us] …face our mortality — [helping us] check back into “living” life rather than simply working, working, working.
* [Helping us] …reconnect with our elders, who are so susceptible to this virus.
* And, washing our hands — how did that become a “new” thing that we needed to remember. But, yes, we did.
* [What if the virus is helping us remember] the presence of Grace for all.
* There is a shift underway in our society — what if it is one that is favorable for us?
* What if this virus is an ally in our evolution?
* In our remembrance of what it means to be connected, humane, living a simpler life, to be less impactful/ more kind to our environment….
* It was time for a change, we all knew that.
* And, change has arrived.
* What if…

## V. Conclusion

* What if, in our fear, we are asking all the wrong questions?
* In no way do I intend to diminish the intensity of the suffering that this virus is inflicting on our vulnerable world,
* but what if we viewed what is happening around us through the eyes of faith and not fear?
* For with the eyes of faith, we see a God powerful enough to heal the brokenness of this world with water and a word of promise.
* With the eyes of faith, we see a God who comes looking for us so that we might be in relationship with the One who has come
* not to condemn the world but to save the world.
* With the eyes of faith, we see a world the Creator deemed to be very good,
* a world that is intimately interconnected,
* a world filled with a great diversity of people,
* all of whom have been created in the image of God.
* With the eyes of faith, we see our purpose in the world:
* to share the Light of the World in whatever way we can
* with all who have been robbed of hope by the blinding darkness of fear.
* Remember, everything changes when Jesus shows up.
* He is here with us now; no amount of social distancing will keep him away.
* So do not be afraid; only believe.
* Peace be with you all. Amen.
1. Rolf Jacobson’s comment is from Sermon Brainwave Podcast #713 at [www.WorkingPreacher.org](http://www.WorkingPreacher.org).
2. Dr. Melinda Quivik’s commentary on John 9:1-41 is located at [www.WorkingPreacher.org](http://www.WorkingPreacher.org).
3. Gurpreet Gill’s post “What if…” is located at <http://gurpreetkgill.com/what-if/>.