

Sermon: Growing old? Or Growing Up?  
4 Lent, Year A  
John 9:1-41

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You have probably heard the saying, “Growing old is mandatory; growing UP is optional!” It’s a funny thing but for some reason wherever I go, I run into people who are growing older. And rarely do I hear people say they LOVE growing older. Why is that? Maybe because we get grey, our skin wrinkles, our bodies don’t work the way they used to. We may feel more aches and pains. We may not hear or see as well. May not walk as well. We may not be living the life we had hoped to be living at this age. And yet for many of us we may still feel as though we are 18 in our minds until we look in the mirror and see we have changed in ways beyond our imagining!

Maybe it’s not so much aging itself that we should focus on; maybe what God cares about is growing? Today’s Gospel story from John is a lot about growth. A young man has gone from being blind from birth to seeing. It is difficult to begin to imagine how Jesus has changed his world. Jesus comes to the blind man and scoops up some of the ground, spits on it and puts the mud on the man’s eyes. How strange and unseemly to our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears! And yet, do we maybe hear an echo of God making the first humans out of the ground in the Genesis story? Evidently God/Jesus likes to play in the dirt!

In this passage, where such an incredible sign as restoring a man’s sight has occurred, the religious leaders don’t seem to have anything nice to say about it! All they can say is that by Jesus’s healing on the Sabbath, Jesus broke the rules - no work on the Sabbath! They act like bullies toward the young man as they interrogate him. Rather than rejoicing in this wonderful restoration of sight, the Pharisees criticize, belittle and intimidate. They act out of fear, fear perhaps that Jesus will impede their status or power, fear of the unknown, fear of losing their authoritarian footing in their world. And the religious rulers instill that same fear in others, threatening anyone who follows Jesus with putting them out of the synagogue.

When interrogated by the Pharisees, the young man says, “I do not know whether he (Jesus) is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” And they proceed to argue with the now seeing man and he basically says, “Look, I don’t know HOW he did it, just that he did it and I can see. What is ya’ll’s problem (and I am sure he said ya’lls)?” “If this man (Jesus) were not from God, he could do nothing.” His fearlessness seems to emulate Jesus’ own fearlessness.

In this encounter the man grows in his understanding of who Jesus is. He goes from referring to Jesus as “the man called Jesus” to later saying, “he is a prophet” to saying that Jesus is from God to worshipping him as Lord at the end of the story.

And yet the religious leaders can’t stand it, can’t stand that this person Jesus is doing these wonderful things so they focus on the detail of Jesus “working” on the Sabbath. Can’t see the forest for the trees. And since many of us know the end of the story we realize that this incident of Jesus irritating the leaders will be one twig on the ultimate bonfire of accusations that will get him hung on a cross. The Pharisees act out of fear and their worlds become inward, small and self-serving, full of suspicion and distrust.

But Jesus acts out of love. And in his reaching out to this blind man he heals him and makes him whole. It is divine love that heals the young man. And he has changed so much that people don't even recognize him. "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" And Jesus' love causes him to go through a tremendous growing experience in this restoration of his sight. He can not only physically see but he is also growing spiritually, growing in his relationship with Jesus and in his understanding of who Jesus is.

How do you make decisions in your own life? Is it through a motive of fear or a motive of love? For most of us the honest answer is through both fear and love and yet Jesus never wavered in his motive of love. Is fear causing your world to feel constricted, and small and self-serving? Or is your world opening up, as you respond to God's love with love for others, bearing the fruit of joy and peace and a quiet mind?

In this week's Forward Day by Day, the writer wrote for Monday's reflection that "Aging happens to us, but growth requires our participation." Yes, we must participate. We have the privilege of responding to God's call of love. Learning to love has a high cost. People will question why you do the things you do. Do it anyway. People will doubt your motives. You may be rejected. You reach out anyway. Because we do it out of love from and for Christ. As we grow we are more willing to take risks to speak the truth in love, more willing to take steps that could lead to understanding. As we grow we are more able to see how God has moved in our past and will get us through this next situation! So getting older has its good sides! We never stop being called to grow by God. Jesus was motivated by love and didn't let the threats, curses, accusations get in his way. Can we learn that same fearlessness of Jesus and the man who began to see?

So, maybe we need not be so concerned about aging as we are about growing, growing in God's love. I will close with the words of Mother Teresa, one who was also fearless and loved when there was nothing left to do. Her actions are right in line with those of the man born blind, and also Jesus.

1. The version found written on the wall in Mother Teresa's home for children in Calcutta:

**People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.**

**If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.**

**If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.**

**If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.**

**What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.**

**If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.**

**The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.**

**Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.**

**In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.**

**-this version is credited to Mother Teresa** and adapted from the original by Dr. Kent M. Keith