

ANOTHER KIND OF BLINDNESS

John 9

Coventry Cathedral; Corrymeela Sunday

15 March 2026

As we barrel our way towards Easter and reach the depths of Lent, we are met with an unusually lengthy passage. A full chapter of John's Gospel is dedicated to the healing of a blind man and to a lot of folks' obsessions with that. Whereas some might see this event as miraculous, many see it only as scandalous. And as a chance to bring someone's sin to light.

It's striking that the first lines of this passage present a contrast in what people give their attention to. Jesus arrives on the scene with a casual stride. Somebody catches his eye. 'As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.' A light, jaunty start. But Jesus's disciples immediately want to raise a heavier topic: sin. 'Who sinned?' they ask. Was it this man's parents who sinned – and that's why he's blind? Or did his own intrinsic sin cause his blindness?

Blind Assumptions

What a jump to make. A nice day. A nice stroll. Perhaps a chance to help someone out along the way – and the disciples can only look for what is wrong. They begin to imagine who has done wrong. They muse on things gone wrong. They do this on their own. Jesus does not bring up sin. Jesus does not suggest this blindness has anything to do with sin. The disciples are the ones who raise the idea of sin and assume the worst of humanity. *Who's blind in this story? Who's looking for things that aren't there and missing what actually is?*

Later, the formerly blind man is brought before the pious Pharisees. And the attention turns from the subject of the healed man's sin – to the sin of the one who healed him. 'He laboured on the Sabbath! He healed a man on a day of rest! How dare he? Clearly: Jesus sins!' So: let's review. A person is born blind. The disciples quickly assume that either he or his parents must therefore be guilty of sin. Another person heals this blindness – and, again, the assumption is that the healer must be guilty of sin. *Who's blind in this story? Who's looking for things that aren't there and missing what actually is?*

A lengthy passage, but as such it gives room for the elaborate and increasingly ridiculous back and forth between an erstwhile blind man and his interrogators, and then between his sheepish parents and a crowd of scolds. The man's neighbours grill him on what happened, refusing to believe what he lays out before them. The Pharisees have a turn, scrutinising his account – and not believing what is obvious. A whole gaggle of people question his mum and dad – asking them to describe scenes they didn't see. The man once again finds himself before a zealous bunch who demand that he make plain what happened.

Please note: at no point in these forty-one verses do any of these inquiring minds state the obvious: that a miracle has taken place. Nor do they acknowledge it is good that a man has been healed. All they can see is the presence of sin. All they are looking for is evidence of wrongdoing. But it's not there. They want someone to blame. Yet no one has done anything wrong. No one here has committed a sin. *Who's blind in this story? Who's looking for things that aren't there and missing what actually is?*

The Certainty Makes Me Nervous

I'm starting to think it's me. ...The *certainty* makes me nervous: the certainty with which the accusers in this story carry out their interrogation. It reminds me of something. The conviction with which people declare the prevalence of sin seems strangely familiar, as does the need to settle the issue of who's at fault. They are seeing sin everywhere they look. Well,

folks: so do I. In this instance, these prudes are seeing sin where it does not exist. So: do I? Am I assigning sin where there is no sin? Am I looking for people to blame when there is no blame to place?

Well: let's not get carried away. If you watch the news, when you consider our broken politics, as you get onto social media, it's pretty clear that there's some sinning going on. And it's hard for me not to assign blame. In all directions. The President did this. The Ayatollah did that. Parliament does nothing. Congress only makes it worse. People seem to be getting away with murder. People we all can name are guilty of foisting blame on someone else – knowing they can probably get away with it. Nations have dropped the pretence of being high-minded, adopting a 'might makes right' politics and implicitly asking: 'and what are you going to do about it?' When you have no shame, you never have to hide. When you don't accept responsibility for anything that goes wrong, you free yourself up to do whatever feels right.

And it's hard not to see that some good people only care about the plight of innocent victims when their own fuel costs start to skyrocket. Some decent people only pay attention to foreign wars when they affect the comforts of home. There are a lot of people like me who want to go back to simpler time, when we knew who the good guys were – and I knew I was one of them and I didn't have to feel guilty. Oh, I'm seeing sin, folks. I'm seeing sin everywhere I look.

What We're Missing

Which may be what is causing my blindness. I may have become so preoccupied with seeing the wrong in the world; I have been so obsessed with locating blame; I have been so aware of the prevalence of brokenness all around, even within myself – that I now struggle to see what good there is and what difference I can make. That is another kind of blindness. One in need of healing. As I have been pointing out what's wrong in the world, what have I missed along the way that are examples of kindness? Moments of healing for heart and soul? What invitations to something different have I ignored over these past five, ten years? Blinded by so many instances of bad behaviour, how many opportunities to do something good have I walked right past? How many genuine miracles have I failed to see?

There was a big festival at Corrymeela many, many years ago. And the organisers had arranged for a prominent speaker from South Africa to come and speak to that experience. The speaker talked about his nation's difficult and prolonged period of apartheid and violence, of injustice and power-hoarding – of the hope alive in certain Christian movements, and the resistance to change coming from other Christians. And after he was done speaking, he took questions. One person from the audience commented on how clearly they could now see the injustice and racism and dehumanisation at play in what had been described, and he asked with great earnestness what we at Corrymeela could do for the people in that struggling nation. And the answer was: you should sort out your own problems in Northern Ireland.

And that was like a kind of healing. It cured a type of blindness that comes when we look for sin at work in other places – rather than see opportunity to make a difference where we are. People paying attention that day decided to take another look at home and found new opportunities to help make peace with those nearby. It opened their eyes to what was already there. And so along with imagining what they could do to end apartheid in Johannesburg, they thought about having their Catholic or Protestant or Muslim neighbour around for a cup of tea.

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. He saw a chance to help a person in need. What do we see? Do we see just another unjust, unfair situation to complain about? Do we see nothing but endless examples of life's brokenness and our own helplessness?

If it's no longer clear to us what good we can still bring about in this world, if we no longer see the opportunities near by to help others in need, it may be because our attention has been taken elsewhere and our vision cluttered with preoccupations of sin and blame that may very well be valid – but have no need for us to point them out again and again. Whether or not there is someone to blame, the desire for certainty can blind us to a greater truth that should be obvious. There are miracles taking place. In Ireland. In England. In Coventry. Right in front of us, as we walk along this path.

Jesus does not bring the concept of sin into this long and drawn-out passage. Jesus brings compassion. Jesus brings healing. Jesus brings attention to where attention is needed, keeping his eyes open to where he can help. So can we.

In the name of the Creator and the Christ and the Holy Spirit, one God: Amen.