

Text: John 9:1-42

Title: Living the Questions into more possibility

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In my early twenties, I was most obsessed and distracted, with having the right answers. As a pastors kid, I was almost expected to know things about the Bible, about God, about life and suffering. Or maybe I just put that expectation on myself.

More recently, I am interested in asking good questions. Not all questions are helpful. Finding just the right one, can open us up to new wonders.

Poet, philosopher Rainer Maria Rilke wrote:

“Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart... Try to love the questions themselves... Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given because you would not be able to live them — and the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers.”

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Our Gospel reading begins with a question. A question that to us seems closed, wrapped in cultural assumptions.

The Disciples ask Jesus: “Teacher, who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?”

To understand this question, we need to put ourselves way back into the minds and lives of first century people.

Author Britt Leslie using a Social Science analysis from cultural anthropology helps us to see the dynamics of the ancient world.

The cultural core values among the disciples and the pharisees were those of honor and holiness. And from this story, it appears that the blind man would have been “seen with less honor”.

Why? Well according to Leslie’s research, sight in Jesus’s time seems to have been based on theories on how vision worked.

“the eyes [were] . . . closely related to the soul or inner person,”

The function of the eye was to emit the light of the soul and to receive the light from others.

The ancients also judged character on the basis of outward physical characteristics - this man born blind “would have been viewed by an ancient audience as pitiful, shameful— associated in some way with darkness”.

The evil. . . within one's heart reaches out through one's eyes [*or in this case, the lack of sight*] and could touch another person or thing.

The impact was not only the functioning of a person, but like a virus, was on the way it contaminated those around in society. "Sinner – stay separate, don't come near, don't bring your darkness, near us".

Darkness 'causes' blindness, blindness emits darkness to others.

"Teacher, who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?"
Now seems like a reasonable question.

Only my friends if there isn't the possibility of more.

Jesus is a very earthy fellow. He spits on the ground, makes mud and touches this man's eyes.

In John's writing, Jesus is embodying the fullness of Christ. John is not interested in Jesus the man, John is interested in the Divinity of Jesus.

And he is interested in showing us that there is always the possibility of opening up to more.

For embedded in this story is a continuation of the Genesis creation story...

Preacher Liz Goodman writes:

As Jesus spat on the ground and made mud, he mixes his saliva with the very stuff of which "Adam" (humanity) in the beginning was made

The Hebrew word: Adam comes from Adamah ("dust of the ground")

Jesus did so to rub this on the man's unseeing eyes, a gesture by which this incomplete bit of creation was made now complete. Continuing the creative acts of God.

Friends, God is yet creating; Christ is yet with God creating.

Making possibility where there seems to be none.

Reconnecting marginalized persons back into community.

Philosopher, technologist Kevin Kelly said in an interview that "It's very likely that the universe is really a kind of a question, rather than the answer to anything."

He says our role as good askers of questions will remain the most important contribution of our species in the coming world.

For a good question opens us up to possibility.

Interestingly, he uses the Amish as an example.

The Amish, this group of religious conservative people, living a heritage out of Northern Europe, who are often seen as being anti-technological.

The image of the Amish is a community who do things without much technology.

But in fact, the story is a little bit more complicated than that. They're changing all the time.

They're in the process of always evaluating.

And it's that process that Kelly found most interesting.

He was most curious about how the Amish decided what technology they were going to use and what they weren't.

The Amish will have no cars and no bicycles, but they'll have skateboards.

They don't have zippers, but they have disposable diapers.

The Amish make their decisions collectively. Based on two questions:

- Will this technology strengthen my family?

And second:

- Does it strengthen the community?

And they live these questions as they experiment and try things out.

What if Jesus' disciples asked:

How can light enter a man born blind?

How can light enter our hearts?

Quaker writer Parker Palmer chooses to live three questions:

- How can I open myself to the beauty of nature and human nature?
- Who or what do I need to learn to love next? And next? And next?
- What is the new creation that wants to be born in and through me?

And in the words of poet Anne Hillman:

We look with uncertainty
beyond the old choices for
clear-cut answers
to a softer, more permeable aliveness
which is every moment
at the brink of death;
for something new is being born in us
if we but let it.
We stand at a new doorway,
awaiting that which comes...
daring to be human creatures,
vulnerable to the beauty of existence.
Learning to love.