

I sat in the pew, listening to my father preach. I was about nine. I listened to my father's sermon, listened to him talking about how God has spoken in his life---how hearing God has comforted, healed, and guided him. I don't remember what he said but I remember sitting in the pew and thinking, "I wish God would speak to me." To my nine year old intellect experiencing God meant hearing a voice and I had never heard that voice. Since I had never heard that voice, I thought, I must not have experienced God.

It doesn't make sense. The healing took place on the Sabbath---the Sabbath--that day of holy rest. If you break the Sabbath you have to be a sinner. If the Sabbath healer is a sinner than the man who was born blind cannot be healed. If he cannot be healed than the man sitting in front of us can't be the man born blind.

"Okay", the group says, "tell us again what happened."

"No more," that man replies. "I've told the story over and over again. I told my neighbours and they didn't understand so they brought me to you. You couldn't understand so you asked my parents. What they said didn't satisfy you so you've brought me back here. Stop asking me about it---or do you want to know more because you want to be followers of the man who healed me?"

The story doesn't make sense, the healing seems all wrong so the religious ones throw the man out into the streets yelling "liar" and "sinner" for all to hear.

The story we hear today from the Gospel of John is not about healing. Unlike many of the healing stories in Mark, Matthew, and Luke the story is not about someone who is an outcast, abused, and excluded being restored into the community---to show God's justice. In the gospel of John, the limited healing stories are present to show who Jesus is---Jesus is the one who reveals God to the

world---is God incarnate. The ones who do not understand who Jesus is, John calls them Jews and Pharisees, some newer translations call them “the religious purity party” miss God in Jesus, and the holiness of the moment.

The story today is about being “blind” to experiencing God. Jesus calls the group of Pharisees blind because they cannot see God at work in their midst. They stand in a closed posture refusing to accept the profound and sacred thing that has just happened because it doesn’t fit into their limited understanding and strict world view.

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The Pharisees were a devote religious group in Jesus’ day. They held tightly to religious practices that helped them to experience God’s presence, make sense of the world around them, and live in the way of God. The Gospels exaggerate their strictness not so much to write off a religious group but to point out the pitfalls of the religious belief. The character of the Pharisees in the Gospels is not some group out there – but a temptation within all of us. We can get so tied into a mindset of proper experiences of God, of right religious practices, of who belongs and who doesn’t that we can miss out on the beautiful breadth and depth of Holy experiences and encounters. It is like being so focused on the beauty of a sunrise that all you do is look east. And the sunrises are beautiful and meaningful but you miss the splendor of the sunsets. What the Pharisees do in the story is they even go so far to say that sunsets don’t happen because they don’t happen in the east and they are not sunrises. We can miss the sunset if all we do is look east.

The Sacred story we hear today from the Gospel of John invites us into a posture of openness and anticipation. We are invited to be open to God’s presence that meets us in both the expected places and unexpected places. Two of my favorite

questions to ask people in small group worship and study is “where is a holy place for you” and “where have you experienced God or Holy presence?” The answers are always beautiful and diverse. I’ve heard people talk being aware of holy presence in churches, in a “cathedral of trees”, the peace and beauty of beaches, forests, lakes, fields, barns, cemeteries, and balconies overlooking the city. I’ve heard people talk about experiencing God in moments of prayer, in worship, in art, dance, music, craft. I have experienced profoundly holy moments in the sharing of communion, and the feeling of my wet hands on children and adults foreheads during baptism, in churches, in Muslim Mosques, a Buddhist Temple, a Sikh Gudurah, around First Nations sacred fires.

When I think of holy moments in my life and about the holy moments people have shared with me I’m amazed at the great diversity and abundance of places and experiences. Where do you experience sacred place? When have you had a moment that felt like God is present, that holiness is abundant?

Now imagine if in my experiences I held tightly onto the assertion that God was only experienced in the church, or that I could only encounter God through scripture, or if the only wisdom and encounter of God was in the Christian setting, or if I believed and said to others that all of the holy moments that they encounter were false if it didn’t fit into a narrow definition I held? The thought of this makes me sad because I would have missed so much and I would be poorer in my life and faith. That’s the price of a closed posture it robs us of holy moments.

But there is also an even more devastating reality that a closed posture can bring. It can destroy lives and relationships. We are in the midst of celebrating Canada’s 150th birthday remembering all of wonderful things that have happened in our

country and the joys of being Canadian. But we are also being reminded of the deep wound a history of closed postures has left in our country. For many years people of the Christian faith, people with power, educators, politicians, voters, and many others said that wisdom couldn't possibly come from the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people of North America. After all, they didn't come from the same knowledge traditions and the same religious background. So out of a dangerous pool of ignorance, misguided attempts to fix others, racism, prejudice, and beliefs of superiority laws were passed, residential schools were built, participation in civic, economic, and political life was banned. And now we are in a place where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has opened our eyes, our hearts, and our ears to the deep wounds and broken history. We are reminded of the necessity of listening and learning about the suffering that was and is caused when people stand in a closed position and say your life, your faith, your wisdom doesn't fit into my worldview so it cannot be of value. Healing and right relations will come, but it will take time, work, tears, a breaking open of hearts, and most importantly an open posture.

God speaks through sacred stories. Our reading from John invites us to stand in an open posture, to be open to God's presence, to holy moments, to wisdom, beauty, and blessing that meets us in the expected and unexpected places. We are also invited to anticipate these moments. Because when we anticipate that we will encounter God in our midst in all moments we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear and the hearts to embrace the sacred encounters that come to us from the expected and unexpected people, places, and moments.

When I was nine years old I thought hearing God meant literally hearing God. I've never had that experience – no booming voice and no faint words. But I have

experienced God in the pulling of my life that have led me into the path of discipleship and ministry, I've experienced God in the profound comfort that washed over me when I felt utterly broken, I've experienced God in the mystery and in the commonplace. And when I find the ways to be in the open and anticipating posture, which isn't all the time by the way, but when I am in this posture that's when I'm more likely to notice, savor, and be led by God's presence in my life.

There are many ways for us to move into the open and anticipating posture. It might be by taking time each day to read scripture, a devotional, poetry, to listen to music, or by engaging in a spiritual practice like meditation, prayerful walking, art. It might be making the commitment to come to this place each Sunday and throughout the week preparing ourselves by saying and praying "today something holy is going to happen." It might be by having the conversations that really matter with people in the church and our lives talking openly about faith and experiences and learning to share boldly and listen fully. Because just as the sun rises and sets and moves throughout our day whether we notice it or not Holy moments are always with us, God is, in the words of one sacred poet, as close as our neck vein. In the expected and unexpected places we will encounter holy moments that remind us that we are all part of God's loving creation and we are all part of the body of Christ at work in this place. We all belong and have a sacred purpose.

So come let us be open to and anticipate holy moments for we are all part of the sacred story. Amen. Let it be so.