

**At the beginning of the service Kjell was lead in blindfolded and took off the blindfold before the announcements.*

What I did at the beginning of the service is what I have always called a Trust Walk. You have to trust the person that is leading you and your build trust as they lead you without harm. I first did this at camp and I noticed that with my eyes blindfolded my hearing improved. This morning story is that of a man that is born blind. Perhaps some of us have had problems with vision but to my knowledge, no one here was born blind or is blind. I feel like the trust walk a small glimpse into this morning story.

In the year 2001, I learned what the German word “hielsgeshict” means. I mean, I knew what it meant - I had learned it in college; literally translated it means “holy history,” but a better translation might be “story history.” It isn’t the facts and dates you might get in a history book; it is the stories you get from people that have lived the history and in the summer of 2001, my experiences taught me the meaning of that word. That summer I was doing my CPE, Clinical Pastoral Education, in Hawaii. I spent 3 months leaning in Hawaii. CPE is where pastors practice their pastoral conversation, talking with people usually in hospital settings all day and then one day a week the five people in my group would write up one of the conversations and analyze what we said with our trained supervisor. I was assigned to work at Poho Nani, a retirement and care facility. Poho Nani is Hawaiian for “surrounded by beauty,” and it was. My job was to talk to people, really to listen, now if you know me just a little bit, you know I love to be in conversation and I love stories. One morning as I walked into the building, Jack was sitting at a table on the lanai, or patio. He had a far-off look on his face and didn’t notice me as I paused and looked at him. Something drew me in, so I walked over and asked Jack if I could sit down. The sound of my voice brought him back, he looked at me smiled and began to move a chair back for me to sit in.

I had talked with Jack before; he had been a pilot, flying freight and passengers and had retired in the late 1970’s. He had told me about his

growing up in Nebraska, seeing a plane as a kid and falling in love; he said, “I knew instantly that I had to be a pilot.” However, I didn’t know anything about where he learned to fly... until that morning. Jack had already flown some when World War II broke out. He enlisted and became part of the Army Air Corps; the Air Force hadn’t yet been formed. For the next two hours Jack told me the stories of his training, how he got to Europe and his service in WWII. I had known the history of those years but in Jack’s stories I had now been given the hielsgeshict, the holy history as lived by Jack.

The man born blind is a real person with a real story, a holy history. Light and dark, sight and blindness, faith and unbelief are all connected in John’s gospel. Think back to the last two weeks stories. Nicodemus comes in the night in the darkness and he can’t see the truth or believe or understand. In last week’s story the women at the well encounters Jesus at noon, she not only believes but then becomes a witness telling what she has seen and inviting people to come and see. Today the man is born blind, literally and figuratively, he doesn’t believe in Jesus. First, the man born blind is listening, and not speaking, as Jesus and the disciples discuss sin. Then he, without words, goes and washes in the pool and his sight renewed. Then the formally blind man is seen and people start to ask questions to which Jesus is the answer. The man tells what he has experienced, remember he had never seen Jesus, but still he is a witness telling his story. When he encounters Jesus he says, “I believe.” The man born blind not only sees literally but is fully comes into the light of Jesus.

Who sinned this man or his parents? The disciples are working with a cause and effect worldview—if there is a negative effect (man born blind) there must be something negative that caused it. They want to be able to explain why bad things happen. We want to make sense of it we want to make it rational. Jesus says, “neither this man nor his parents sinned.” Jesus doesn’t deny that sometimes actions have bad consequences but he is saying that worldview won’t work here, you can’t explain it away. The way the NRSV reads is, “neither this man nor his parents sinned, he was born blind, so that the works of God

might be revealed in him.” “He was born blind” is not in the Greek text and it makes it sound like God caused the blindness because God needed an occasion to show off. That’s not what is going on. Jesus redirects their search for a neat rational answer, you can’t have that. You can have a sense of what can God do from here, given the blindness what can God’s grace, action, healing power do from this point forward. We start where we are and with what God is calling us to do.

This is about trying to figure out what faith looks like, what does it mean to encounter the life giving presence of God in Christ, even if you never laid eyes on him? We need to go back to John’s definition of sin. Sin is not what you did wrong, but not being in relationship with God/Jesus. The man born blind’s story is all about the potential of the blind man to be in relationship with Jesus, or to see. The Pharisees don’t see, they remain/abide in the un-belief. The man born blind is beyond seeing he is a sheep.

Next chapter in John is the good shepherd passage where Jesus is interpreting the sign of giving sight to the man born blind. The man hears Jesus before he sees. Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice.” We experience faith in all five of our senses. With our eyes closed we heard the story, at the wedding at Cana we tasted the abundant love of Jesus. Faith surrounds us, fills us, and sends us out to tell others what we have experienced. That happens in relationship and that happens when people ask questions to which Jesus is the answer. The man born blind didn’t have a relationship with the Pharisees but they were asking question to which Jesus was the answer, so he tells them. It is also in the midst of trustworthy relationships that we can invite people to come and see. Think about the trust walk I did as I walked in...that is what we need to do in our everyday lives—both leading and being led. In our daily lives at work, home, in community and congregation—it is pretty simple: do what you say you’re going to do when you say you’re going to do it. That builds trust. That makes the world a more trustworthy place. That builds relationships out of which you can credibly invite people to come and see. Invite people to encounter the

God that shows up in all our senses bringing faith in and relationship with the God of abundance—the God of grace upon grace.

This last year at Peace, we have experienced grace upon grace! We have been blessed by the people that have served us and by the people we have been blessed to serve. Today is the Annual Meeting a time when we look back and reflect and a time when we look forward to the amazing mission God is calling us to. We are called by God! We are blessed to participate with the living God active in our world. We get to live into God’s visions, to live in the light, to live in the Amazing Grace, that fills us and sets us free from our blindness. Jesus loves us and cares for us and walks with us into the light. Amen.