

The Rev. Charlie Holt

When I was in college, I had to take a class my freshman year called Exceptional People and that the idea of the class is that there are people who are born like this man that was in our gospel passage that are born blind, and we often labeled them as disabled or handicapped or something like that, when really we could think of them in more positive terms and just say that that people are different.

You know, some people are exceptional. And that was the name of the class, was to introduce us as young college students to the reality that not everybody's made the same way. And, and we need to be more loving and accepting and, and see the gifts that people have by being exceptional. And maybe there have one thing less of one thing, but they might have some great strengths in another way.

A good example of this was a lady named Fanny Crosby, who is one of the famous hymn writers, a lot of our hymns that are beloved were written by Fanny. She was, blind as from a very young age. But, nevertheless, her insight, she had a heightened sense of awareness that was, because of her blindness.

She had incredible senses. One of the things I had to do when I was part of the Exceptional People classes, I had to go and serve a man who was blind. And I would walk him around the neighborhood and do things with him and for him. But I picked up on the fact that the fact that he was blind actually gave him these and heightened senses.

He could hear things. Way better than I could hear things. And, and had perception of his surroundings in a way that, that maybe somebody who had sight wouldn't see. And this is the way Fanny Crosby was. She was a person that that, had a spiritual insight to things that made her this incredible hymn writer. And so one day she was over at her friend's house and her friend had a piano and a tune had come to her mind.

Dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun. She puts it down on the piano and she said, Fanny, I know you get inspired by the Lord. So I have this tune and I think that you are the one who is

supposed to write the words to this hymn. And she says, let me play it again. Dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun dun.

And what? What comes to your mind? And Fanny says, blessed assurance. Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine. And she went on from there, and she just out of her came this incredible, beloved piece of music, just from hearing, a little series of notes on a piano like that. What an amazing person.

One of the lines. And blessed assurance is, visions of rapture burst on my sight. Here's a person who's blind. And yet she could see. She could see the incredible glory of God bursting upon her sight. Really, really an amazing, amazing person. This is. This is what Jesus is really getting at. And John, the gospel writer, all through his gospel, and we've been studying passages from the Gospel of John during lent.

He's trying to get us to see that, that there's more to reality than the worldly reality that we perceive. And the first person that we interacted with in this regard was Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night. And Jesus said to Nicodemus, you must be spiritually reborn. It's not enough for you just to be born into this earth by your natural mother, but you need to be born again of God, born from above.

Another way that you could put it. And so there has to be a spiritual rebirth that takes place in your life. That's one of the first lessons of lent that we're trying to get across, is that we need this spiritual awakening inside of us. If you haven't asked for that, ask for it today. This is a good day to ask for being spiritually awakened to the presence of God and be born again.

Then the second week we looked at the, the woman at the well and remember she was interacting with Jesus about physical water and marriage. And which mountain do you worship on this one or that one? And Jesus says, you need to be thinking about this in spiritual terms, that that the hunger and thirst that are inside of you, that have been manifesting in terms of wrong relationships, looking for love and all the wrong places is actually a spiritual hunger and a spiritual thirst that can only be satisfied by living water.

And so, you need to be asking for living water. And then this Sunday, what we're thinking about is real knowledge, real wisdom, real insight into the nature of reality only comes through seeing things through spiritual eyes that in a sense, we are all blind from birth. And what we what we need is to have our eyesight quickened by the Lord.

So that he can help us see reality and mainly see him as He truly is. So here is this man who was born blind from birth and, Jesus is asked by the disciples, is, is this guy some kind of big sinner or something that he was blind from birth? Or maybe it was his parents because it was from birth, you know, so maybe his parents are to blame and the consequences of their sin are being waged on this fellow.

The disciples needed to go to my exceptional people class, didn't they? And Jesus, Jesus said, this doesn't have anything to do with sin.

This man was born blind from birth so that I could display the power of God through his life. I want to I want to make him a living testimony to the glory of God. And then he says this I am the light of the world.

And that's the insight that we all need, is that that Jesus is the source of the light, that if we really want to be able to see in the midst of this dark world, that we need to have the lights turned on by Jesus, he is the light of the world. There was, philosophers, the Jewish philosophers names Mortimer Adler very famous philosopher from last century, and by last century it was exactly last century, was born in 1902 and died in 2001.

You couldn't stick the landing any better than that. But he, he searched all of the philosophies and religions of the world. And one of the things that he realized is that all of the philosophies and religions of the world seem to operate with an airtight logic to them, except for one Christianity. Christianity left a lot of room for God to know things that we don't know, and for our logic to reach its limits of our ability to understand things.

And he said this in an interview in 1984. He said, my chief reason for choosing Christianity was because the mysteries were incomprehensible. He's talking about things like the two natures of

Christ is fully God and fully man, and the Trinity. God is three persons father, son, and Holy Spirit, and yet one God or the problem of evil.

You know, we so many philosophers try to solve the problem of evil and blame it on humanity or say, there can't be a god if there's evil, but Christianity holds out mystery, and there are things which our brains can't quite figure out. And so he says, my reason for choosing Christianity was because the mysteries were incomprehensible.

What's the point of revelation if we could figure it out ourselves? If it were wholly comprehensible, it would just be another philosophy. And that that is why Christianity, for him had a ring of truth, is actually because it didn't originate from our own logical understanding of things. But actually the lights came on from outside of us. And this is what Jesus is saying is, I am the light.

You need the light to shine from outside of yourself and outside of your brain so that you might understand and truly know and so here this man, he takes this. Somebody asked me today, why did why did he spit in mud and put spit on his eyes? That's kind of gross. And I said, yes, but with Jesus, it's very holy spit.

You know, it's the most sanctified spit that you could ever have. Is the Christ spit. You would want that spit on your eyes, especially if you couldn't see. Right. Some of y'all might, might be looking for that. I'll help you. If you were wearing glasses, I can go spit and do some mud after the service.

We'll try it. Anybody? But. But she was really, really disturbed by that, so. But he takes the spit and mud and puts it on his eyes. Tell him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. And there, he's healed a man born blind. And the people are around that they're recognizing him, but they're seeing that he has sight now.

And there. It does not compute. And this is the problem of our brains with the things of God we just can't completely understand. And God, and they say, well, this can't be the man. And some

are saying, well, yeah, it is the man. And the guy says, hey, guys, I'm standing right here. It's me. Well what happened?

Well, he just put mud on my eyes and told me to wash and I can see. Oh, and the Pharisees just go nuts because it doesn't compute their religious philosophy and the way they've organized everything, and it's outside of their boundaries and control and so, they bring him in. What happened? Put mud on my eyes. I can see.

Who do you think this guy is? And all of the sudden, what begins to happen in this man's life is he starts to become a living testimony to Jesus. The more people are, are asking him to tell the story of how his life had been changed by Jesus. The braver and braver he gets, and the more clear that his own self understanding of who Jesus was.

It started off with the neighbors just saying, the man named Jesus did this to me. And then when the Pharisees asked him who he was, he says, he's a prophet. And then by the end of it, this guy is full on teaching the Pharisees what they really ought to be coming to as a logical conclusion in their understanding of who Jesus is.

I love this interaction. Toward the end of the story where they bring him back a second time and they say, give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner talking about Jesus. He says, well, I don't know whether he's a sinner or not, but the one thing that I do know, I was blind, but now I can see.

They said to him, well, what did he do to you? He said, I already told you. Are you wanting to hear it again so you can become his disciple? He's just messing with them. And it's neat to see how this testimony of this, this man, gets stronger and stronger as he is refined in the midst of their doubt and skepticism.

I, I mentioned, you know, University of Florida. I can't help but to talk about that great institution, though we didn't do too well with basketball this past weekend, but the, one of the, when I became a Christian and became very zealous for the Lord and my life really turned around, I went from pursuing a frat boy life to really being all in for Jesus.

And I was trying to live the life. And the, one of the moments was I would go around with my Bible in my backpack at school, and any chance I could talk to somebody about the Lord, I would do that. And that kind of feels a little obnoxious. But that was just the way that I was at that moment.

And there was this one guy that I was talking with, and I didn't know him from Adam, but I worked the conversation towards Jesus, and he said to me, he says, if you really believe this stuff, you should just get out there in the middle of the plaza and start preaching to everybody. And I, I just said to him, and the Lord gave me the words.

I said, I really do believe this stuff. And I'm telling you about Jesus. And he says, that's a good point. And he kept hearing me out about the faith. Now, I don't know whether he gave his life to the Lord or not, but I can tell you that the more I shared my faith in those days, the bolder and bolder I got, and bearing witness to the name of Jesus Christ, and every skeptical conversation that I had interacting with somebody actually made me a better apologist and a better witness to the faith.

I wonder, you know, just ask. Ask yourself this. You know, how is my witness to the change that Jesus has wrought in my life? The light of the world has shone brightly in your life and in your heart, and hopefully that has transformed you and made you into a bright and shiny witness and testimony to him. And as you have interacted with others about your faith, has it has it emboldened you and made you stronger and stronger and your witness and your testimony as it did for the man who was born blind?

Eventually it gets to the point in the conversation where, they they've had enough of him. They, he says, he tells them, he says, any if this man were not from God, he could do nothing. And they said to him, well, you were just born in sin, and you would teach us. And they cast him out of the synagogue.

And when Jesus heard that they had cast him out, they found he found them, and he says, do you believe in the Son of Man? And the man says, who is he, sir, that I may believe in him. And

Jesus said to him, you have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you. Yes, Lord. I believe for judgment, and he worship Jesus in that moment.

Jesus goes on to say, for judgment. I came into this world that those who do not see may see, and those who may see may become blind. The Lord, wants to give the people of this world spiritual insight to see the light of Jesus Christ. And one of the main instruments that he will do that is actually through the testimony of, of your life.

Certainly, there are skeptics and people that are hard hearted and blinded by their own sin. The Pharisees overhearing this conversation with the man, they end by asking this really self-analysis kind of question, but it actually is a testimony to their own hard heartedness. They said, are we blind? They're getting they got the message that Jesus was making.

Are we are you saying that we're blind? Jesus says to them, if you were blind, you would have no guilt. But now that you say we see, your guilt remains. And, this is really the crux of the matter when it comes to having spiritual insight, that there is a type of pride and arrogance that thinks we have all the answers, that has the logical, airtight philosophy and way of looking at the world.

And then there is, like Mortimer Adler and this man who was born blind, a type of humility and teach ability of spirit that is open to the light actually coming from outside of ourself, that that the light of God might want to, to shine in the darkness of our ignorance and our fallenness and even our brokenness and, and illuminate us from the inside out.

One of the great, apologists of the Christian church was a man named John Newton, who was a slave trader, and he was a person whose heart was filled with darkness, skeptical about God and, captain of a slave ship can't get much more, despicable of a kind of person than that. And yet the light of Jesus Christ shone in John Newton's life in such a degree that he gave his life to Jesus.

And he renounced the darkness that was captivating his life. For he was a slave, but a slave to the darkness. And he was found and he wrote one of the most famous hymns. It's called

amazing Grace. And we just read it and it quotes this particular passage where he says, I was lost, but now I'm found.

I was blind, but now what I see this is the prayer of Jesus for us is that we would actually be humble about our spiritual blindness and recognize that we need his light to shine in order that we might be those who truly see. Let us pray. Heavenly father, thank you for the gift of your son Jesus, whose light shines brightly in the darkness, even in the darkness of a college student life, or a blind man who's blind from birth, or even and hardhearted Pharisees or slave traders.

You are the light of the world, and without you we dwell in darkness. And so I pray that you would shine your light into the hearts of every single person that is sitting here. And if there's somebody that that really, truly needs your light to shine brightly, that you would just beam it into their mind, into their hearts.

I right now and fill them with all of your fullness of your brightness and set them free from the darkness so that they might have the light that they could truly see. It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen.