



To Really See Rev Diana Rattray

Year A, Lent 4
1 Samuel 16: 1-13
John 9: 1-41
19 March 2023

Two weeks ago we heard of the death of Georgina Beyer after a period of illness. Georgina was the first elected transgender mayor in New Zealand and the first openly transgender Member of Parliament in the world. She had previously been an entertainer and sex worker in Wellington, before moving to the Wairarapa and the town of Carterton. In a documentary that aired this week on Māori television, the current Mayor of Carterton, Ron Marks, talked about how a small, somewhat conservative town elected a Maori, Woman, transgender Georgina, first as Mayor and then as Member of Parliament for Wairarapa. He said “The town saw her, respected her and elected her.”¹

They saw her. A sharp mind, a hard worker. They saw past the prejudices. Georgina pushed people past their prejudices so they could become who their authentic selves.

Today’s gospel reading is long. It is full of encounters and imagery. It continues the journey of John’s gospel which is all about the signs, pointing to Jesus. While the Pharisees questioned and debated about Jesus, people were being healed and lives were being changed. Their scepticism was based on jealousy of Jesus’ popularity, not on sufficient evidence. Many were unsure about their encounters with Jesus.

Writer and priest, Richard Rohr once wrote that Jesus came to change our minds about God. ² Today’s gospel invites us to be

¹ https://www.maoriplus.co.nz/details/TV_SHOW/collection/6271450166001/te-ao-with-moana

² Richard Rohr, *Eager to Love: the Alternative way of Francis of Assise* 2014, 187.)

open to, and see, newer and even deeper encounters with God through Christ.

Those who gathered around the unnamed man, whose sight was restored, were being opened to new encounters – only when they were willing to loosen their grip on the dominant ideas they had about God, about faith, about healing. When we learn how to look, we can see everything under a divine horizon.

Just as light makes it possible for us to see, the Spirit of truth is the light of love. We have seen throughout the gospel stories that it is the beginning of hope. The light of love – leads us to a greater acceptance, an appreciation of things as they are.

Once we have really seen things, we cannot un-see things. Once we acknowledge the brokenness of the world then we are propelled into action. We begin to see people who have been made invisible, we see those who have been shoved to the margins and exploited. Doing nothing is no longer an option.

One of the most powerful images I hold from Georgina's life is on the steps of parliament when she moved down towards the crowds who had marched along with Brian Tamaki with the cry Enough is Enough. At the risk of her own safety she was filmed countering the verbal abuse she was receiving and I quote: "Why do you hate people like us so much? Be real Christians. I have known much more Christian charity from other people that what I have seen from you today. I am going to come and look at each and every one of you in the eye... Your hatred is totally intolerable... How dare you use the cloak of Christianity when you are imparting to your children prejudice, discrimination toward people like me, gays and lesbians and other people who live differently but abide the law."³

As I reflect on Georgina Beyer's life and her impact on so many I am not sanctifying her. Like all of us she was not perfect. I am acknowledging the way she saw the people who she interacted with in her world and how she in turn pushed us to see things and people differently.

³ <https://youtu.be/oAgU6ssVUKU>

Today's gospel includes the reminder to hear again Jesus' rejection of a causal link between disability and sin. There are too many who continue to hold attitudes that blame people for their disability, their unemployment, or their illness. The grip of the prosperity gospel is strong. That false teaching that people who prosper are blessed and are good people and that anyone who doesn't is bad or at fault.

The strange healing, spitting on the ground, the taking of the mud, putting on his eyes and the washing the man's eyes in the pool of Siloam, is an act of compassion. As the man's eyes are opened the writer of John's gospel is opening our eyes to a wider perspective. Jesus is not just a healer. Jesus is the light for the world's darkness. Night and day, darkness and light often make a difference to how we feel about things and the world. There are some people who are physically blind. They constantly with darkness or mottled light. There are more people who have emotional or spiritual blindness. As we hear this gospel account today we are all invited to see, with our very blind eyes, with all that troubles us, with our wounds, with our brokenness. Jesus' response is that the blindness was an opportunity for the works of God to be manifest.

To walk in the light is not to be naive. It is not about being happy. It is about owning a commitment to justice and embracing a stance of compassion for all human beings. Jesus is the image, the exact reflection of God. We are called to become the image of Jesus.

As we gather for worship, in person and online, we see glimpses of the light, through scripture, liturgy, music and sacrament. In turn we are to be light in places of darkness in our world and to hold on to the flicker of light when we are in places of darkness in our own lives.

Jesus paused, stopped, saw, healed in the ordinary places. He mixed with the outsiders. He showed love towards the sinners, the tax collectors, and prostitutes - those on the edges of society. The only ones Jesus ever expressed anger toward were those who thought they were good and had all the answers.

The first step toward movement from blindness to sight is to acknowledge our blindness. All of us are blind to one thing or another. This gospel passage is inviting a movement from head to heart. The questioning of the man who had been blind, the

questioning of his parents, the trying to understand “the what and the how” somehow stopped many around him to noticing what was right in front of them.

A transformation of one who could not see to one who could not only see but who also could recognise the One who healed him. When we truly see, we are given new eyes, new insight, new vision, new understanding. We are still very good at hiding injustices or hiding ourselves from them to our shame. We live in a world where the rich are getting richer and many struggle to afford the basic necessities of life. We remembered this week the 51 people who lost their lives through an act of terrorism in Christchurch four years ago as they were attending worship. We acknowledge that discrimination thrives when minorities are allowed to perpetuate threats and cause fear and worse.

Jesus offers a new paradigm. His world is not self-centered. His world is often unwelcome and threatening to those who have power and those who make policy, for those who perpetuate violence. For those of us who follow the teachings of Christ there is a cost. Jesus' actions lead him to a violent death – but that was not the end. As we continue our Lenten journey, as we move closer to the journey to the cross let us think again about what we pass by when we need to stop and see. To really see.

Let us pray for restored sight so we can see things through the eyes of Christ. A light that cannot help but be about compassion and care and concern for all human beings.

Amen