

## “Just Do It!”

- I. Introduction: Just do it! Today’s Gospel reading from John contains a moving account of the healing and conversion of a man who had been blind since birth. Jesus spit on the ground, covered the man’s eyes with the mud he created, and then sent him off to wash in the pool of Siloam. As a result of Jesus’ actions, the blind man could see for the first time in his life. As John so often tells us, Jesus brings light into the darkness and in that process transforms that darkness with new life.

This passage is dramatic because there is more to this story than the healing itself – much more. In addition to the healing, there is a story line developed in some detail about the blind man, the disciples, and the Pharisees. First of all, no one asked Jesus to heal this man – not the blind man himself, not the blind man’s family, nor any of the blind man’s friends. This makes this account different from most of the other healings. Secondly, there is a lot of dissension around this healing: When Jesus’ disciples saw the blind man they asked Jesus whose sin had caused the man’s blindness. They didn’t see the man’s need. They skipped over that, attributed his calamity to sin, and started to analyze that sin rather than responding to the man’s need. The Pharisees, whose job it was to “certify cures” were deeply confused and accusatory in responding to the healing. They also assumed that the man’s blindness had resulted from sin and that his healing was part of a subversive plot to advance the cause of Jesus. This story is rife with misunderstanding and distortion.

- II. Jesus and the blind man. On the other hand, the portion of the account about Jesus and the blind man tells a very different story! It was Jesus who saw the blind man. It was Jesus who covered the man’s eyes, not just touching them, but putting mud over them, made from his own saliva. Jesus’ healing of this man was personal and up close. It’s also noteworthy that the blind man allowed Jesus, who was a stranger, to put the mud on his eyes and then went as Jesus directed to wash his eyes off in the pool. Later, when the Pharisees questioned him, the healed man told the truth, defending the miracle that Jesus had done. In response the Pharisees drove him away. Jesus then went to look for the man and invited him to believe in Jesus as the Son of Man. The healing was then complete. The physical healing was followed by the man’s spiritual healing.

Here it is in a nutshell: Jesus saw the blind man's need for healing; Jesus responded; Jesus involved the blind man in the healing process; and Jesus supported the man and brought him to faith after the man had withstood the attacks of the Pharisees. Jesus had not required that the blind man profess his faith before he stepped forward to help him. Jesus had only asked that the blind man enter into a process with him and remain open to the healing that he could offer him. Jesus just saw what the man needed from him and did it! Implicit in this story is a message to us, Jesus' disciples. I believe that we are asked to model ourselves after Christ, using the active approach Jesus demonstrated in this passage.

III. On the receiving end. The man who had been blind from birth was on the receiving end of Jesus' discernment of his physical and spiritual needs and, through Jesus' actions, he experienced healing. A little over two years ago, I also had the opportunity to experience healing through the acts of a number of fellow Christians who learned that I had a need and responded proactively. On December 21st 2005 I received an unexpected call from my physician's office that an X-ray ordered to evaluate whether I had pneumonia had shown a large soft tissue mass on the left side of my chest. The next day I underwent multiple tests which indicated that I had either a large goiter or a tumor in or on my left thyroid. Five physicians, multiple tests, and one surgery later I learned that I had a follicular adenoma or tumor on my left thyroid that was surgically removed. Almost two weeks after the surgery, we finally learned that the tumor was benign. With the help of medication to aid the remaining right side of my thyroid, I fully recovered.

I came to think of this time as a period in the wilderness. I have heard others talk about the experience of having their lives changed in what seems like an instant when receiving news of a possible serious illness. This was the first time I had experienced such an earthshaking event myself. The best way I can describe it is to say that I felt more afraid than I usually do, less in control of my life than I usually feel, and utterly dependent on God to sustain me. Overall, the experience was one of living in the wilderness and experiencing testing and frustration, mixed with islands of God's grace.

During this period I learned how important it is to remain open to the ways God gives us what we need, often through the actions of those around us. The day after learning that I would need surgery, a parishioner at St. Christopher's called to see how I was. She was an administrator at the VA hospital and knew how important it is to have confidence in one's surgeon. She highly recommended a surgeon who, it turned out, was in a prayer group with Peg's father. Through a series of events that I do not believe were co-incidental, this excellent surgeon, who is a devout Christian, operated on me within a week. I have no question that God was directing this process.

Day after day while we waited to learn whether the tumor was benign or malignant, God sent me signs of life in my desert – signs of life from other Christians who saw or learned of my need and just responded. Cards and letters with messages of humor and love from many people in many places came in intervals throughout the process. Many sent me powerful spiritual messages. I'd like to share three of these with you. The first was from a person who had had a tough bout with cancer. She wrote: "I have wonderful memories of both Peg and you praying for my healing at Cursillo. What incredible power, as God worked through you, and the wonderful healing of fear for me. . ." She concluded: "Give God your worry, your fears, your pain. He is the Great Healer — and keep giving them back to Him!" A second card was sent from a person who had had her share of surgeries and had found this prayer from St. Frances de Sales helpful to her:

Do not be afraid of what may happen tomorrow . . . the same everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you then, and every day.

He will either shield you from suffering, or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it.

BE AT PEACE . . . and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations.

A third person who had faced many challenges sent me an excerpt from the book *The Prayerful Heart* (Charles Allen & Helen Rice) with several portions underlined: "The mind begins to magnify our problems and make them seem larger, then with our problems growing larger, we add other ingredients to our thinking, such as resentment, self-pity, fear of worse things happening, hopelessness and despair. . . Stop concentrating on your weakness and begin thinking of His strength . . . Paul declared: 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me' (Philippians 4:13)." What I began to see was that God understood my fear and from a widely scattered and diverse range of Christian brothers and sisters, God was giving me what I needed to deal with my fear.

- V. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. As disciples of Christ we are asked to bring his light into the world. Today's Gospel passage seems to tell us to "just do it," to respond to the needs we see around us without engaging in judgment or procrastination or self-doubt. Let me repeat that – to respond to the needs we see around us without engaging in judgment or procrastination or self-doubt. "Just do it." There are parishioners here at Ascension who have been doing this for some time and others who have begun to do so in new ways. These are important steps for us. Here are several thoughts to ponder as we continue this process together:

1. When Jesus saw a need he stepped out to meet it. We are asked to do likewise.

2. When we step out as Jesus did we want to always remember that the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs we see in others are intertwined. We must try very hard not to limit what we offer to only one kind of need.
3. We should not let judgment, fear, or low self-confidence hold us back from taking action. If we sense a need we are to respond no matter how modest we may think our response will be. Those letters that I received often got me through very tough days. God met my needs through those letters.

What a privilege it is to be used by Christ to bring light into a world that is sometimes very dark. Thanks be to God for the opportunity to walk with Christ into some tough, tough places where his light is much needed. *Amen.*