

Blaming the Victimizer: Vision, Blindness and the Judge (John 9:8-41)

Lenten Soup Supper Series at Christ Episcopal Church Eureka

March 13, 2018

The Rev. Daniel London, PhD

Read Rowan Williams's Foreword to James Alison's *Knowing Jesus* (1993)

Read John 9 / Assign roles for **Narrator (blue)**, **Disciples/Pharisees/Jews (green)**, **Jesus (red)**, **Man Born Blind (black)**, **Neighbors/Parents of Celidonius (purple)**

Identifying with the Man Born Blind (Celidonius)

*“Intelligence of the Victim”: awareness of the innocence of the accused victim, whom God seeks to liberate, and the willingness to side with the accused victim even if that means becoming a victim as well. (Alison, *Knowing Jesus*).*

Celidonius defends accused victim and risks victimhood in the process

Symbols of Blindness and Vision

	Blindness	Vision
Intelligence of victim (manifested in man born blind)	Physical experience (in need of new vision) →	“open-eyed freedom”
Compulsion to blame (manifested in interrogators)	“veil of self-delusion”	← Physical experience (convinced vision is clear)

Jesus says, *“I came into this world for judgment so that those who suffer from blindness may not only receive physical vision but also be empowered by the open-eyed freedom that risks victimhood in defense of other victims. I also came so that those who believe that they can clearly see will come to realize that their vision is, in fact, veiled and blinded by their compulsion to blame.”*

Metaphor of Judgment and Light

The Judge (Jesus) subverts the dichotomy by working to embrace and transform both those who see (and possess the intelligence of the victim) and those who are blind (blinded by blame)

The Judge's Commitment to the Blind Accusers

The NRSV translators seem to remain committed to interpreting the Fourth Gospel through a “Jesus vs. the Jews/Pharisees” lens. Although there is certainly much in the Gospel that can support this lens, such a perspective can also limit our vision and blind us to those key moments in John when Jesus and the Pharisees are closer than we initially imagine. In this verse, the Pharisees are not just “near” or “around” Jesus.¹ They are “with” (*μετ*) Jesus.

Identifying with the Interrogators

The Trial Motif in John

The Sabbath *Analepsis*

Revisiting the Johannine “Jews”

The Jews are perhaps the most complex character in the Fourth Gospel

Jesus does not accuse in order to expel. He exposes in order to engage and transform.

Dichotomies are introduced in John not to build some people up and put other people down, but rather to reveal to the reader the ways in which she or he has already been healed, and perhaps more importantly, the ways in which she or he still needs to be healed.

The Johannine Jesus receives and *wants* them both



¹ The NRSV renders the phrase: “Some of the Jews near him...” Newman and Nida explain, “The phrase *with him* is translated in a variety of ways: RSV and Phps [Phillips] ‘near him’; JB [Jerusalem Bible] ‘who were present’; NEB [New English Bible] ‘in his company’; NAB [New American Bible] ‘around him’; Mft [Moffatt] ‘beside him.’” Newman and Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of John*, 319.