

“Wow! I Had No Idea!”  
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based on Psalm 139:13-16; Philippians 2:5; and John 9:1-3

(Psalm 139:13-16)

*<sup>13</sup>For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.*

*<sup>14</sup>I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.*

*<sup>15</sup>My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*

*<sup>16</sup>Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.*

(Philippians 2:5)

*<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

(John 9:1-3)

*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.*

When I was growing up I had a cousin who lived nearby and would come with his parents to visit every once in a while. My sisters and I would play games of tic tac toe on our toy room blackboard. He was quite good at it!

My cousin’s name was Bobby.

At that time in my life, when I was about 8 or 9, Bobby was already in his 40’s. Bobby was (what we then termed) mentally retarded.

The years of my growing up always included Bobby. But as I grew up, I would advance in school, go to college, be out on my own...but Bobby would mentally stay ...an 8 or 9 year old.

Bobby grew up in a very small community. He was often harassed by people; some even throwing rocks at him...or the men who hung out at the local store would try to teach Bobby to smoke cigars. They teased and bullied him.

The one refuge Bobby had, other than his home and the homes of his relatives...was the church.

Bobby attended every Sunday with his parents. He would dress up in his suit and walk with his folks to the Methodist church. There he was accepted and was a part of that faith community almost all his life.

When I asked my mom last week about Bobby, she said: “To his parent’s credit, Bobby was included in everything they did; went everywhere they went. Bobby was...Bobby!”

Bobby lived in the day and age where social programs for the mentally disabled were few and far between. Much later in life, Bobby got a job at a local factory that hired him, and others like him, to do a repetitive task of screwing a bolt onto a widget and for that they were paid a stipend.

Bobby LOVED his job. He had a purpose in life and took pride in the fact he brought home a paycheck.

Then someone somewhere decided it was against Bobby's civil rights he didn't make minimum wage and worked unsupervised...and so the job was ended.

It broke Bobby's heart.

Bobby died sometime in his 60's. His parents predeceased him...and it had fallen to my mother to be his health care proxy and oversee his medical needs and living and burial arrangements.

I remember attending Bobby's graveside service and I saw inscribed in the family tombstone the saying: 'Thy Will Be Done'.

...I've often wondered...did Bobby's parents believe it was God's will that Bobby was born with a mental disability?

I honestly don't know...but I suspect...they did.

Today's scripture readings could have contributed to their believing that was so.

Our lessons particularly from Psalm 139 and John 9 imply God knows (even before we are created) the days that will unfold before us...and that God has a purpose for us all.

How do we swallow such a bitter pill to think God...with intention...creates children less than whole? Children born into bodies and minds that seem to struggle...while others thrive and flourish in a world that values physical and mental achievements.

Today we begin our four-week series on Disability Awareness by confronting this very question. Because at the root of our faithful response to God's call to welcome all into this spiritual home...we must come to terms with our theology of God.

Do any of us truly know God's will? Do we dare to think we can know the mind of God and God's intention in creating?

Who is this God that creates? That loves us? And that comes to us in Emmanuel?

Somewhere in our theology of God do we dare to meet face-to-face the idea that despite God who creates all things good, still creates bodies with disabilities?

Its possible Saint Paul had the same questions about God's intention in creation. God who has created and is creating is not a far off, distant, other-worldly being...but is God made real to us in Christ Jesus.

And in his letter to the church in Philippi, Saint Paul gives us a clue how to better know the will of God when he urges the believers to “<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,”.

Know Christ Jesus...know God.

Think not of God whose Spirit is invisible; but of God in whom we see face-to-face in Christ.

- Be of the same mind as was in Christ Jesus.
- Love with the same mind.
- Have compassion with the same mind.
- Offer mercy with the same mind.
- Accept one another with the same mind.
- Open our eyes to God's grace with the same mind as in Christ Jesus.
- And...at the very least: affirm our ministries as ones that openly and enthusiastically welcome all despite any mental or physical disability.

I wonder about those men who sat bored at the corner store and watched as Bobby walked by... if they had had the same mind as was in Christ Jesus would they have thought of ways to help Bobby and not tease or bully him?

I don't want to imply in any way that Covenant isn't already a welcoming faith community; with no intentional policies or programs that prohibit us from being welcoming...but what I do want us to explore is what we don't know...or what set a blind eye to?

What is it that we aren't aware of? How can we be in ministry *better* with disabled persons?

My hope/prayer is that after four weeks we go "Wow! I Had No Idea!"

I want us to see new possibilities for ministry. New insights...new awareness of how we can not only better understand persons with disabilities but how we can honor their gifts and abilities in doing the work of Jesus here in this place.

The Bobby's of this world deserve a greater understanding.

Believing God's gift of grace is far greater and more amazing than our limited understanding, we honor the lives of those who live with disabilities. Lives that some would define as difficult, but as a child of God, a life of simple beauty and a life fully defined by God's universal gift of grace.

No one ever understands fully why some are born into bodies of completeness and others are born into bodies that struggle...unless it is, of course, to experience how God loves *all*, no matter the physical or mental limitations...but loves by matters of the heart.

In the fourth verse of our last hymn we sing of God's created order:

*As each far horizon beckons,  
may it challenge us anew,  
children of creative purpose,  
serving others, honoring you.  
May our dreams prove rich with promise,  
each endeavor well begun.  
Great Creator, give us guidance till our goals and yours are one.*

God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens (UMH 150)

Thanks be to God!

Amen.