

Lent 4, March 19, 2023

JOHN 9:1–7, 13–17, 34–39. (EHV)

As Jesus was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “**It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that God’s works might be revealed in connection with him. I must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the World.**” After saying this, Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and spread the mud on the man’s eyes. “**Go,**” Jesus told him, “**wash in the pool of Siloam**” (which means “Sent”). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. ... They brought this man who had been blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. So the Pharisees also asked him how he received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man told them. “I washed, and now I see.” Then some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath.” Others were saying, “How can a sinful man work such miraculous signs?” There was division among them, so they said to the blind man again, “What do you say about him, because he opened your eyes?” The man replied, “He is a prophet.” ... They answered him, “You were entirely born in sinfulness! Yet you presume to teach us?” And they threw him out. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out. When he found him, he asked, “**Do you believe in the Son of God?**” “Who is he, sir,” the man replied, “that I may believe in him?” Jesus answered, “**You have seen him, and he is the very one who is speaking with you.**” Then he said, “Lord, I believe!” and he knelt down and worshipped him. Jesus said, “**For judgment I came into this world, in order that those who do not see will see, and those who do see will become blind.**”

What are the effects of exposure to the light?

There are both good and bad effects, right? On the one hand, exposure to the sunlight brings warmth and Vitamin D and brightens the mood. People who live in areas with more sunlight tend to be happier and healthier people than those who live in areas with less. Even exposure to artificial light has advantages. You can see where you’re going and can describe things clearly and accurately. You’re less likely to hurt yourself by tripping or bumping into things.

On the other hand, if you look directly at the sun, you will hurt your eyes, and prolonged exposure can lead to sunburn. Sometimes artificial light exposes things that are unpleasant or that you would rather not have known about. For example, you might not know that the dog was sick during the night until you see where he was lying after turning on the lights in the morning.

What about exposure to *the* light? Jesus says it’s much the same. He summed it up this way: “For judgment I have come into this world, in order that those who do not see will see, and those who do see will become blind.”

1. It Gives Some Spiritual Sight

“In order that those who do not see will see.”

Jesus had been upsetting the Jews with some pretty impressive claims, like this one: “If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” Or this one: “I tell you the truth, before

Abraham was born, I am!” In fact they tried to stone him after that claim, but Jesus hid himself and slipped away from the temple grounds.

But it appears that he and his disciples stayed in Jerusalem. And as they were going along, they saw a man blind from birth.

Perhaps some of you have relatives who are blind. But can you yourself imagine being blind from birth? Sometime when you’re at home, just close your eyes for ten minutes and try going about your business as usual. You will be extremely slowed down. Not only will you have to walk much more slowly, but you’ll need other people to do some of the simplest tasks for you, like reading the mail. If you kept up this charade, you would eventually also experience some injuries, a lot of frustration, and depression.

Now imagine that this is all you’ve ever known. You don’t even have memories of what things look like. The still, quiet beauty of the woods, the vast expanse of the rolling plains with their scattered buttes, the beautiful forms and shapes of other people, animals, and buildings, the layout of your own house—you know none of these things. And if your parents weren’t wealthy, you probably wouldn’t have much of an education and so you’d have some difficulty comprehending the world around you. Then there are all the things that you would be glad you couldn’t see, if you knew they were happening—people whispering about you, children pointing at you, youths laughing at you, and questions like the one Jesus’s disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Job’s friends made the same mistake Jesus’s disciples did. They saw all of Job’s misfortunes and thought, “Job must have done something really bad.” But Jesus warns his disciples against that kind of judging—arbitrarily using physical circumstances to determine spiritual circumstances: “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that God’s works might be revealed in connection with him.”

And God’s works started out rather curiously. Jesus spit on the ground. He bent over and stirred it with his finger until there was a muddy paste. Then he took that paste and spread it on the man’s eyes. (What did the blind man think of all this as he was sitting there?) Then after Jesus covers his eyes in mud, he tells the man, “Go and wash them off in the Pool of Siloam.” Jesus has healed many others with just a word or a touch, but for this blind man he not only smeared dirt soaked in his own spit on his eyes, but he also tells him to find his way to a specific pool and wash—not an easy thing for a blind man to do, and we’re not told Jesus or his disciples gave him any help. But prompted by Jesus’s invitation, that’s just what he did, and God’s work was displayed.

Grace Lutheran Church in downtown Milwaukee is the birthplace of our church body. In the mid-1900s someone was examining some old pictures of the church and noticed that there were two stained glass windows in the chancel, one on either side of the altar, windows that were no longer there. Or were they? Someone chipped away at the wall at the place where one of the windows used to be. A chip went flying and at the same time a ray of light poured in. Faster and faster they chipped away at the walls until these two beautiful, light-filled stained glass windows were uncovered—windows they never knew were there.

It must have been a similar sensation for the the blind man in the pool, only better. He dips his hand into the water and scrapes off some of the spit-soaked mud. As he does so, a new sensation! Light pours in. He actually sees his fingers moving away from his eye. Faster and

faster he washes off the mud, until he is standing there in the pool, seeing its sun-dappled shades of blue, seeing the glittering sparkles of light on the water, beholding the beauty of the world around him—beauty he never knew was there.

But that wasn't the end of God's works. The man might have thought his troubles were at an end, but they were just beginning. Some of his neighbors wouldn't believe that he was the same man. So they brought the Pharisees to investigate. The Pharisees intensely questioned the man on two different occasions, not only to learn if he was the same man, but also to learn whether Jesus's message was legitimate.

At first the man didn't comment on Jesus. Then he declared him to be a prophet. Finally he told the Pharisees that he *had* to be a man from God in order to do something so great. The last remark got him excommunicated from the synagogue. He had regained his sight, but he now stood outside just as blind and clueless as ever.

Jesus knew from the beginning that simply giving this man physical sight was not enough. If he had done nothing more, he would have simply made the man more cursed than before, for in the eternity of hell, he would have not only experienced the pain with his hearing, smell, taste, and touch, but now also with his sight.

So when Jesus heard he was kicked out he went to find him. And he did.

"Do you believe in the Son of God?" Jesus asked him.

"Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" the man asked.

Then Jesus revealed to him the true beauty of his sight: "You have seen him, and he is the very one who is speaking with you."

And just as the water of Siloam had done to his eyes, so now Jesus's words did to his heart, removing the blindness of unbelief and letting the light of faith, forgiveness, and salvation pour into his heart. "Lord, I believe," he said, and he knelt down and worshiped Jesus. The works of God were truly revealed in connection with him.

Did you ever wonder, friends, why Jesus did things the way he did in our lives? He knows all those who are going to be saved. He's known from eternity. So why didn't he just have us be born believing him? For that matter, why didn't he just have us transplanted to heaven as soon as we were born? Why didn't he just have us be born in heaven?

It is for this very reason—so that God's works might be revealed in connection with us. We were not born believing. We were born unbelieving. We were not born seeing God. We were born spiritually blind. But Jesus invited us to be washed in his pool, the pool of the baptismal font. And for most, if not all, of us, Jesus did not wait for us to fill up many years with blindness. He had us washed right away, so that we could enjoy many years of sight, so that we could say with the blind man, "I was blind, but now I see."

For others of us, he perhaps waited, but that too was in grace. Because then, when you were washed, you could more clearly call to mind the contrast between your years of blindness and your years of sight. You too can now say with the blind man, "I was blind, but now I see."

No matter the case, we have our baptism as something visible, something historical, something memorable we can point back to and say, "There. That's when God's works were revealed in connection with me." And we can point back to it no matter how badly things are going, no matter who may doubt us, no matter who may question us, no matter who may think us

insane and keep away from us. Still we can always say, “This fact remains. I was blind, but now I see.”

And friends, if this is the blessing power of Jesus’s spit, let us run to his word, which is much less disgusting and holds much more promise! Let us run to partake of his entire body and his precious blood, which was given and shed for our forgiveness and salvation!

2. It Confirms Others in Their Blindness

This is one effect of exposure to the light. But there is another side to this story. Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, in order that those who do not see will see, and *those who do see will become blind.*”

Yes, Jesus had just made some impressive claims, but he immediately backed them up by healing this man born blind. What more powerful testimony could there have been? Yet, for all the healthy sight of some of the man’s neighbors, for all the healthy sight of some of the Pharisees, they continued to get more and more lost in the thickest spiritual darkness.

They pretended that they wanted to see. They pretended to make an investigation looking for objective evidence that would show them the truth. But they ignored the evidence that confirmed what they didn’t want to see. It’s like how today scholars will deny the resurrection of Christ because if people could rise from the dead, they would rise from the dead. But they conveniently ignore the evidence in the Bible that people *have* been raised from the dead and that Jesus has risen from the dead. The man’s neighbors and the Pharisees also seized and twisted evidence that confirmed their blindness.

Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. So they ignored the fact that, even though Jesus had worked on the Sabbath, the work he had done was a work of kindness and mercy. They ignored the fact that this work of kindness was a miracle. They ignored all this and said, “He has to be a sinner. And if he’s a sinner, then there’s something inherently wicked about this miracle, or the miracle itself was a fraud.”

But all the evidence was indicating otherwise. The man told them Jesus was a prophet. The man’s parents told them that yes, this was their son who had been born blind from birth. The man told them a second time that Jesus was from God; he *had* to be if he did something as amazing as healing someone blind from birth. And what was their response? “You were entirely born in sinfulness. Yet you presume to teach us?”

They were confirmed in their blindness. So much so, that they even denied clear truths of the Old Testament. Was the man entirely born in sinfulness? Of course he was. David wrote in the Psalms that *he* was entirely born in sinfulness too (Ps. 51:5). Moses wrote that every inclination of our hearts is evil from childhood (Gen. 8:21). But the implication of the Pharisees was that this man was entirely born in sinfulness, but they were not. If they had realized their own need for forgiveness, they would not have dismissed Jesus and his message so quickly.

Was the man presuming to teach them? Of course he was. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 119 that he had gained more insight than all his teachers because he meditated on God’s word. The Pharisees, and we, have every right to be lectured at when we are ignoring God’s word. If they had realized their own blindness, they would not have dismissed so quickly what this man was teaching them.

Brothers and sisters, do not be surprised at our times. Do not be surprised when the world reacts so negatively and so strongly against Christianity. That is the effect of the light of Christ—for some, it gives spiritual sight; for others, it confirms them in their blindness. The more God's word is preached, the greater the divide will be—the greater our sight, the greater their hostility toward Christ and his followers.

What is our refuge and comfort when we see these things? To simply note the facts, as the blind man did. "Say what you want world, but this remains: Christ has died. Christ has risen. From the beginning of time, no one has ever heard of a man raising himself from the dead. I was blind. Christ found me and washed me in baptism, and now I see. I was hungry. Christ found me and fed me with his word, and now I am satisfied, and he continues to feed me with his word and holy supper. You can have all the property and wealth, all the clothes and prestige, all the hearing and sight. Without Christ, you will remain penniless, naked, deaf, and blind. But I, no matter what I have or do not have, yet this I will always have: my true sight, my faith in Jesus, forgiveness of sins, peace, and eternal life."

Let us then persist in Jesus's saving word, and let us with the man born blind kneel down and worship him now and always. Amen.