

“What Do You Say about Him? It Was Your Eyes He Opened”

John 9:1-41

Lent 4

John 9:1-41

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.

²His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent).

Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.”

¹⁰But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?”

¹¹He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹²They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight.

He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.”

¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.”

But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?”

And they were divided.

¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.”

He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”

²⁰His parents answered,

“We know that this is our son,
and that he was born blind;

²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees,
nor do we know who opened his eyes.

Ask him! He is of age.

He will speak for himself.”

²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.”

²⁵He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner.

One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”

²⁶They said to him, “What did he do to you?

How did he open your eyes?”

²⁷He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen.

Why do you want to hear it again?

Do you also want to become his disciples?”

²⁸Then they reviled him, saying,

“You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses,
but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”

³⁰The man answered,

“Here is an astonishing thing!
You do not know where he comes from,
and yet he opened my eyes.

³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners,
but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.

³²Never since the world began has it been heard
that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.

³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

³⁴They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins,
and are *you* trying to teach *us*?”

And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”

³⁷Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”

³⁸He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

³⁹Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment
so that those who do not see may see,
and those who do see may become blind.”

⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”

⁴¹Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin.
But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

The Sermon—A Prayer

Who am I, O God, in this unfolding drama?

Am I one of the disciples,
one who sees someone who has been blind since birth
and assumes it was either the blind person's own fault
or his parents'?

How many times have I seen someone burdened
with what I regarded as an infirmity, a weakness, a curse,
and thoughtlessly wondered what they must have done wrong,
mercilessly speculated about
what poor lifestyle decisions they must have made,
or what bad positions they must have put themselves into?

Son of God,
be the light of this world,
for people who are blind, like me—
blind to the humanity of others,
blind to my own propensity for judging
when I should know by now
that when I judge anyone but myself,
I am—at best—only guessing;
but really, I have no idea what I'm talking about
and no right, anyway, to be so presumptuous
toward any of your children.

Who am I, O God, in this unfolding drama?

Am I the person born without the gift of sight,
touched by you so that now I can see,
haltingly but assuredly testifying to the things that I know
in my bones and from my experience,
even though I have never seen your face?

How many times, Lord Jesus, have you touched my eyes,
and given me the ability to see things that I never did before?
And how many times have I forgotten to come back to praise God
and to thank you for that gift?

Am I one of the neighbors

who can only see the man as they have always seen him:

day after day, year after year, a poor, blind, helpless beggar;

and even after he is freed from having to sit and beg,

even after receiving the miracle of the gift of sight

that so many of us take for granted,

they can't seem to accept that it really is him—

some saying, "Well, maybe it's someone just like him,"

while an unspoken but insistent voice

seems to whisper in our prejudiced minds,

"Those people are all the same, you know..."

while the man himself cries to their deaf ears,

"Friends, neighbors, it's really me;

Don't you know me?

Didn't you ever really know me,

as anything but a blind beggar?"

Son of God,

how many people have I become so used to seeing as beneath me—

pathetic, a charity case,

someone to whom I can comfortably condescend,

and maybe feel good about myself

if I help them out a little once in a while—

How many times has my inability to see someone as an equal

left me blind to the beauty and the gifts that person has brought to me

and to the world in which they most worthily live?

O God, bless that person,

and forgive my blindness, for Jesus' sake.

Who am I, O God, in this unfolding drama?

Am I one of the interrogating Pharisees,

who responds to the magnificent gift of healing,

a positive transformation of someone's life,

an undeniable miracle,

not by giving praises to God;

not with celebrations for someone who was blind now being able to see,

but with cold-hearted cross-examinations,

implicit accusations that someone must be lying,
someone must be gaming the system
(a system which isn't supposed to be ours to begin with, but yours).

How many times, O God,
has evidence of good news come my way,
only for me to get lost in the details,
or to be overcome by cynicism, or suspicion, or worst of all, apathy;
or resentment of someone else's good news?

Help me, O God,
when I see someone who has been miraculously healed,
not to respond,
“How dare someone perform a healing on a sabbath day?”

And, O God,
Help me, help us, help your whole Church
to recognize and celebrate miracles of healing among your people,
and help us recognize the difference
between encouraging true and faithful discipleship of Christ
and forcing people into following cultural assumptions
about what it means to participate in church life
as if it were still seventy years ago, or 200 years ago,
or 1500 years ago,
as if all churches were required to be just like each other,
as if the most important thing
was that we who were in the Church first
are always the most comfortable?

If it be your will, O God,
let your Holy Spirit deconstruct what we have made of this institution,
overcoming closed-minded desires
to interrogate
and dissect each other's motives, understandings, and credentials,
that we may truly heed your call—
“Come to me, *all* you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest”—
to stop manning the fortress gates of “church membership,”
and start throwing doors wide open for all who would follow you,
and tearing down walls that would keep your disciples from going out,

to distant shores or our own neighborhoods,
taking whatever it means to be “church” into the world,
among the humanity that you so beautifully adore.

Or, O God, am I one of the fearful parents of the man who was born blind,
wilting and withering under the interrogation
of those who are skeptical of what I claim to have seen for myself?
Am I too afraid of the judgement of doubters to say what I believe;
Am I too cowed by those in authority
who would dictate to me the meaning of what happens in my own life?
Am I too closed-mouthed in the face of bullies
who are accustomed to imposing
their opinions, their worldview, their reality, their power,
on all those around them?

Help your Church, O God,
and all of us who have Good News to share with the world—
to learn to say it boldly,
trusting the Holy Spirit to teach us the words (Luke 12:11-12).

Am I one of the offended Pharisees on the interrogation panel,
who recalled the man who was born blind to the witness stand,
and when that man challenged my reasons
for continuing to grill him on exactly *how* Jesus had opened his eyes,
and asked if maybe it was because *I* wanted to become a better disciple,
reviled that man for saying such an impertinent thing to me,
for daring to question my right to question,
exposing my righteousness
as the pathetic self-righteousness it really is.

O God, help me, help us, help your whole Church
to be open to the voices and the questions
of the young and the inquisitive,
and those who lead us to think our way into places
that do not come naturally or comfortably to us.

Or am I, finally, the Pharisee who lost his temper
and resorted to the theologically weak and empty assumption
shared by the unexplored “conventional wisdom” of the time—
conventional wisdom even shared by the disciples,

who were still learning—
when he shouted at the person born blind,
*“You were born entirely in sins,
and are you trying to teach us?”*

How often, O God, have I allowed conventional wisdom
to go unchecked—even within myself—
because it’s just easier
to fall back on the simplicities of a world
in which “good” is, by my definition,
whatever makes me comfortable to believe,
and “bad” is everything outside the familiar boundaries
of my own beliefs?

Forgive me, O God;
Forgive us; forgive your whole Church
for our stubborn insistence
that what makes sense to us is the final word,
and for believing and behaving as if the new life you would bring to us
must be subject to our own approval,
for believing and behaving as if your holy, divine, healing love
has to be run through our committees
before it can be accepted.

I ask in the name of Jesus Christ,
who was born and lived for us,
the one who died for us,
the one who was raised
and lives eternally for us;
in his holy name, we pray. Amen.

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March 26, 2017
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