

February 24, 2008
Lent 3

"Blind, But Now I See"

JOHN 9:1-7, 13-17, 34-39

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. ⁴ As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. ⁷ "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam." (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." ³⁴ The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! Your don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." ³⁸ Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

My wife was in the supermarket buying groceries. She noticed a little girl reaching up and feeling the different items in the produce section. Then she reached up and felt the apples, oranges and bananas. She followed her mom to the meat department and reached up and felt the packages of meat. One of the managers was watching her. The mom came and explained the situation. "My daughter is blind, and the only way she recognizes the fruits, and vegetables and meat is by feeling them."

That was also true of the man that Jesus healed. He was born blind from birth. The only way he could recognize objects was by feeling them and touching them. He could touch a flower and smell it but had no idea about its brilliant colors. He could stroke the soft fur on a cat and hear it purr, but never see its mysterious green eyes. He could feel the warmth of the sun on his skin, but could not see the objects the sunlight illuminated. He could hear his mother's voice and even remember her distinct smell but he did not know what her face looked like.

What a change this man had in his life when Jesus opened his eyes to see. Not only did he have the miracle of sight, but he was able to recognize objects because he was miraculously healed by Jesus. Even more important Jesus opened his eyes of faith to believe he was his Lord and God and Savior just as he has opened our eyes of faith to see and believe. We think of the words from "Amazing Grace": "I once was lost but now am found, Was blind but now I see."

Be thankful you can see with your physical eyes

When we see people who are born blind, or walking down the street with a seeing-eye dog, we are led to give thanks to the Lord that we have eyes that can see. Why are some people born blind, or why do some people suffer from diseases that make them blind? Jesus disciples asked him, "Rabbi who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" They wanted to know the cause of this man's blindness. Was it something he did after he was born that caused him to be born blind, or was it something his parents did? It is not uncommon for people even today to think that God punishes people by giving them children born blind for some sin they have done in their past life. The friends of Job tried to help search his past life for the sin that would have caused the Lord to afflict his life with trouble.

Jesus gives an answer regarding all pain and suffering in this world. It is worth remembering when someone you know begins to wonder whether God is punishing them for some evil they have done. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." Jesus reminds us how a loving, kind, good and gracious God can work good out of the evil and the trouble that comes to us. The troubles of this life become opportunities for the Lord to bring glory to his name. Romans 5 says that we rejoice in our sufferings, because in the midst of suffering we have the opportunity for the Lord to develop an even great hope in his love and the future glory that he has waiting for us. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

We can see the good that comes from evil by what Jesus tells us about himself as the light of the world. "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world I am the light of the world." Life is full of opportunities for the light of Jesus' love to shine in the lives of people. When death comes or the world comes to an end these opportunities no longer exist. This man's blindness would provide Jesus with an opportunity for people to believe in him. Jesus also used this opportunity to open the man's heart to believe. Some of the best opportunities you have ever had to point people to Jesus as the light of the world have been the times of trouble that have come in your life.

Now watch as Jesus uses this man's blindness to open up the eyes of people who were blind to his love for them. Jesus spit on the ground and made some mud that he placed on this man's eyes. Then he told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man took Jesus at his word. He went to the pool, washed the mud off his eyes, and immediately he was able to see. People stood in awe and amazement and said, "Isn't this the man that used to spend his time begging because he was blind." Can't you see him running around, jumping up and down, shouting for joy, looking at things that he could only touch and feel? See him run home to his mother and father and brothers and sisters, and the tears of joy running

down his face from eyes that can see the faces of people he loves for the first time ever.

When was the last time you woke up in the morning, looked out the window and said to yourself, "Lord, I am so thankful that I can see the beauty of the world that you have given to me?" You are privileged to look at people you love and see their faces and look into their eyes. You can walk down a path and know where to place your feet, or drive a car and know where to stop, or pick up a newspaper and read the news, or watch the news on television. When people find out there are having problems with their eyesight they can be fitted for glasses, or get medication to protect their eyes or even have surgery to help them see better. When people are in danger of losing their sight, we go to the Lord in prayer and ask him to bless the help they are receiving from the eye doctor and we ask the Lord to heal them. Has anyone here had cataract surgery?

The Lord has sure done a good job of creating our eyes. Our eyes are not the product of millions of years of evolution. They are gifts to us from the Lord. Psalm 139 says this about our eyes and every part of our body, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." What a privilege it is to use our eyes to read the pages of the Bible and come close to God through his word. There is an old saying, "Seeing is believing." An even greater privilege is believing in something we see with our faith eyes but cannot see with our physical eyes.

Be thankful you can see with your faith eyes

The Pharisees who criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath show to us how blind some people are to the blessings that God freely offers us through Jesus. When the blind man told them how Jesus put mud on his eyes and enabled him to see, they made the claim that Jesus could not be God for he did not keep the Sabbath. Even the Pharisees believed some work could be done on the Sabbath. According to Old Testament law if your neighbor had an ox or a sheep that fell into a pit, you could help them get the animal out of the pit before it died. How blind they were to say Jesus was a sinner who broke the Sabbath laws by healing a man who was born blind on the Sabbath day. Here is what Jesus said about their blindness in Matthew 23, "You blind guides! You strain at gnats and swallow camels."

"Amazing Grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found. Was blind but now I see." These words were written by a man named John Newton who grew up listening to his mother tell Bible stories and have her read to him from the Bible. Then she died and he had to live at sea with his father as a cabin boy. He picked up the sins of the sailors and became blind to the love that Jesus had for him. He even justified in his mind that it was OK to pick up captured slaves and sell them to people in England. Then one day the Lord opened his eyes to the amazing grace of God he once knew as a child. He wanted the whole world to see what he had come to see again in his life.

We can point our fingers at the Pharisees for the blindness in their lives. Let's be honest this morning and recognize that we can develop blind spots in our lives where right becomes wrong and wrong becomes right. We may even become so blind that we look down at others for things they do wrong and justify things we do wrong just as the Pharisees did at Jesus' time. We were born into the darkness as our second lesson pointed out to us from

Ephesians 5, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." You were totally blind to the how God created the world, totally blind to who God is, totally blind to how he saves you, and totally blind to the glory he has waiting for you in the place Jesus has prepared for you. What Paul tells us I 1 Corinthians was once true of all of us. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." Then it goes on to say, "But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit."

Now let's see how Jesus opens the faith eyes of the man who had been blind so that he sees even greater blessings in his life. The Pharisees treated the blind man cruelly for simply witnessing to what Jesus did for him. They accused him of being steeped in sin because he was born blind. They threw him out of the synagogue. They were nasty people. But then it says that Jesus found him. Jesus enjoyed finding people, reaching out to them, coming into their lives and opening up their eyes to see him as their Savior. He asks the man who now could see, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Notice how Jesus always refers to himself as the Son of Man. He wants us to think about how he emptied himself and stooped down to rescue us. "He was crushed for our iniquities." The man then asks Jesus, "Who is he sir? Tell me that I might believe in him." Then Jesus said, "You have now seen him, in fact, he is the one speaking to you." This man with the beautiful eyes that see birds soaring, flowers blooming, dogs running, fruit of different colors, is now privileged to see Jesus and look at his face. Here is the face of the man who had put mud on his eyes and healed him. What a joy it must have been to look into the face of Jesus, a joy greater than seeing the face of his mother for the first time! He looks into Jesus eyes and says, "Lord I believe!" Then he bowed down and worshipped him.

Today we are gathered here in this place so thankful that our eyes can see Jesus for who he truly is. Jesus tells us that he has come into this world for judgment "so that the blind will see and who see will become blind." Thank God that what you are no longer blind to the truth of how you are saved, but now you see your salvation in Jesus. Today we can go home and look for opportunities this week to take what we have seen in Jesus and share it with those who are still blind. The night is coming when no one can work. Amen.