

March 23, 2014
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.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. ¹⁷ Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."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."

He never saw the light of day. He could feel the warmth of the sun on his face but there was no light coming into his eyes. He could hear his mother say, "I love you" but he could never see her face. He could recognize the voices of familiar people who passed by as he was begging but he never saw the smiles on their faces as they placed a coin into his outstretched hand.

One Sabbath day his life changed completely. As he sat in his usual place asking for money, he heard people say, "Jesus was coming." Jesus was looking at him and he did not realize it. However, he did feel the pain of hearing one of the disciples ask Jesus the question he often heard before, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind." How often hadn't he personally struggled with this question, "What did I do wrong that I was born blind."

His eyes could not see but his ears could hear Jesus speak. There was something about the voice of Jesus that was different from all other voices he ever heard. There was love and compassion and caring as Jesus says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this has happened so that the work of God might be displayed in this man's life."

He senses someone is coming closer to him and it is Jesus. He hears the sound of spitting. Jesus is spitting in the dust. What's that rubbing sound I hear as if someone is rubbing in the dirt? My eyes, he is touching my eyes. He is putting something squishy and soft on my eyes. It feels like mud. Now I hear his voice even closer to me speaking with same loving tones. "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam."

The blind man listens to the voice of Jesus. He goes to the pool of Siloam, bends over the water and washes his eyes. When he opens his eyes he can see light for the first time. The darkness is gone.

For the first time he sees the bright blue sky and the bright sunlight. He sees people walking with faces and hair and ears. A bird sings and he marvels at how it can fly away. A hundred million nerve endings in his brain are sending new messages recording what his eyes are seeing. He goes home and sees his mother's face for the first time. Tears of joy are streaming down her face. Friends and neighbors look at each other in wonder and amazement, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" "How then were your eyes opened?" they ask him. He joyfully responds: "The man they called Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

You cannot read this amazing account of Jesus healing the blind man without thinking about how Jesus opened your eyes of faith. "I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."

Losing sight of God's love

One of the greatest challenges facing us in life each day is just to keep our eyes open to how much our God loves us and cares about us. Jesus' disciples showed how they lost sight of God's love when they ask the question, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind!" People say, "What goes around comes around" or "What did I do wrong to deserve this?" they speak about "bad karma" getting punished for doing something wrong. Job's friends thought the best way to help Job was to help him ferret out the wrong he had done in life that merited all his suffering.

Jesus makes it clear that God does not punish people with blindness because they sin or because their parents have sinned. Instead he says, "This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." I can bring punishment on myself through certain sinful acts. For example, if I steal I can go to jail. If I take dangerous drugs, I can fry my brain. If I am reckless with my life, I can get hurt. Most of the problems we experience come as a direct result from Adam's fall into sin. While I was working on this sermon, I noticed the hawk that likes to sit in the tree next to my office had killed a mourning dove. We are living in a dying world. Blindness, hearing loss, strokes, cancer, and diabetes are the result of living in a dying world brought out on by Adam's fall. Jesus wants us to know that bad things can actually be used for good as he says, "So that the work of God might be displayed in his life." This blind man would provide Jesus with an opportunity to perform an amazing miracle that draws attention to his power as God to rescue us from our sin.

Life is short and every moment is an opportunity to lead people out of darkness into the light of Jesus' love. Jesus says, "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." This past week in our youth confirmation class we were discussing how Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the heavenly Father taking care of his church and using us for his glory. There is only a certain amount of time that we have as followers of Jesus to bring the light of his salvation to those in darkness. Jesus is so involved in using us for his glory even use our troubles in life become opportunities for the light of his glory to shine through 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." So we say, "Lord Jesus open my eyes to see how the troubles I am going through can be used to bring others to the light of your love."

Not seeing God's love

There are people you know who are totally blind to God's saving grace and mercy. That was certainly true of the Pharisees who were blind to who Jesus was and why he had come into the world. People brought this former blind man to the Pharisees to find out more about this amazing healing. The Pharisees were the super religious people. They meticulously followed certain laws of the Old Testament and other man made laws with the belief that their careful obedience to these laws made them God's special children. "How did you receive your sight?" they asked. "Jesus put mud on my eyes and I washed, and now I see." I love the way the man simply bears witness to what Jesus did for him.

How did the Pharisees respond to this man's witness to Jesus? They accuse Jesus of not being from God because he healed this man on the Sabbath day. How could they be so blind? The Sabbath laws did not forbid helping people who were in need of help. It even allowed for hard work to rescue an animal that had fallen into a pit. These people were so engrained with their own self righteousness they had no place in their hearts and lives for Jesus to come and rescue them. In Matthew 23 Jesus compares them to a cup that was dirty on the inside but clean on the outside. How foolish it would be for you to have cups in your cupboards that are nice and clean on the outside, but totally dirty and gross on the inside. The Pharisees looked so religious in some areas and so awfully sinful in other areas.

They ask the man who once was blind but now sees, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." He believes Jesus is a prophet, perhaps even that great prophet who was to come. He has seen the evidence that Jesus is truly someone special because only someone who comes from God could possibly perform such an amazing miracle.

We have something in common with these Pharisees who were blind to God's love for them in Jesus. We were born into this world with the same blindness. Our second reading for today from Ephesians 5 says, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." I can still see evidence of this darkness or blindness in my life. I am sure you can see it in your life as well. We focus on following Jesus in some areas of life but then we become blind to other areas of life where we fail to see the sin for what it truly is. Ephesians 5 says, "Live as children of light and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful

even to mention what the disobedient do in secret." The Pharisees had their sin that they could not even see. We have secret sins that we do not see for what they truly are. How much we need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see our sinful condition and then open our eyes to see what Jesus has done to rescue us. Psalm 139 says, "Search me, O God and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way to everlasting life."

Seeing God's love clearly

Things did not go smoothly for this man who was healed by Jesus. The Pharisees threw him out of the synagogue when he refused to join them in discrediting Jesus. Remember this man has not yet seen Jesus face to face. Jesus comes to him and asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Jesus comes to open his eyes of faith. It says of Lydia in Acts 16, "The Lord opened her heart to believe."

The man says, "Who is he sir?" "Tell me that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact he is the one speaking with you." He says, "Lord I believe." Then he worshipped Jesus. The eyes that have for the first time seen the trees, clouds, and blue skies and faces of people are now looking at Jesus his Lord and God. When Jesus appeared to Thomas and showed him personally the nail marks in his hands, Thomas said, "My Lord and my God." Then Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." You are so blessed this morning to stand next to Jesus and say to him with eyes of faith, these amazing faith eyes, "Lord, I believe." In Ephesians 1 the Apostle Paul says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be opened." And then he prays in chapter three, "that you may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." "I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see." Grace is truly amazing. Amen.