

## **John 9:1-41**

*As Jesus walked along, 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, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work 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." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The 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?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He 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." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."*

*They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then 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." Some 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. So 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."*

*The 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 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but 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." His 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. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."*

*So 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." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He 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?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he*

*opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.*

*Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus 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." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."*

I want you to hear a couple of things again from our second reading this morning. It comes from Paul's letter to the Church in Ephesus. He tells them, "Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light." Not the you were in darkness and now you are in light. You were darkness. You are light. The second thing to remember from that passage is that everything that is exposed by that light, which is everything, the good and the bad, becomes visible.

Can you imagine what it was like for the blind man in our Gospel passage this morning? Blind since birth. Never having seen the colors of a sunset, or a rainbow, or another person's face, or the immensity of the Temple. Living in darkness in a world where everyone else, at least everyone who you have had any contact with, all those people whose generosity you depended on, live with a sense that you could not even imagine. I have no doubt that it would be a sense that you would long for. I know I would.

You know, I have worn glasses since grade school. I don't really remember much about that initial change from a blurred world to a clear one. I was probably more concerned that I would look weird versus how I would see better. And I need to tell you, looking back at pictures, that worry was warranted. My black rimmed glasses made me a spittin' image of Ernie on the TV show *My Three Sons*. A fact that my brothers never let me forget.

So, as soon as I could, I think it was around 16 years old, I switched to contacts. I mean, what girl was going to like a boy with Ernie glasses, right?

Over the years, glasses or contacts were just a normal part of my existence. They came and went. What I mean is that I lost them, or broke them, or they found some other way to leave my possession. I knew that I didn't see well without something hanging on my face or floating on my eyes, but that was just the way it was. Then, sometime around 1997, I decided to get Lasik surgery. I had both eyes done at the same time, even though that was not the recommended path. After the surgery, patches were applied, and prescriptions filled, and Jane

took me home with instructions that I was to go to bed and not take off the patches until the next morning.

The next morning was clear and sunny and I got up and sat by the bedroom window that looked out over the neighborhood with the mountains in the background. I removed the patches, squinted and blinked a few times and then just stared. I was amazed. I could see each individual leaf on the trees. The mountains were crisp and sharp in the distance. All of this without any assistance. As a matter of fact, I could see better than I had ever been able to with the previous aids. And it was not just that I could see. I had seen with my contacts. It was that I was different, and through that difference, everything else was more, it seemed to mean more than it had been just the day before.

Now, I know that it was only surgery. It was a small thing in comparison to what Jesus did for the blind man, but it seemed to me to open up a deeper experience of life, the way I was intended to embrace it.

Can you imagine what it was like for the man who was totally blind for all of his life? Of course, he was physically different. He could physically see when he had never been able to before. But it had to be more than that. After all, Jesus was using this man's life as a lesson for all people. Something bigger was going on. It had to be more than just a hocus pocus magic trick with mud and spit to impress people. This man's blindness was meant to be used, Jesus told his disciples that it was put there to be used, in order to show everyone something about God. And maybe it was meant to show us something about us also.

So, what are a few things that we can see in this passage?

1. First of all, the man's blindness was not a punishment. He was not blind because he sinned, or his parents sinned, or anybody sinned. In retrospect, his blindness turned out to actually be a privilege that he carried so that he could one day be a servant in God's disclosure of His plan of salvation. Jesus was teaching the people that they are looking at things incorrectly. God is not sitting up in Heaven, lightning bolt in hand, just waiting for someone to mess up so he can bring His punishment to bear. That is not the Father that Jesus shows us. If they were, if we are, to understand the true mission of the Messiah, we need to know that God is not a God that takes away sight. He is the God, through His Son, that gives it. God enhances life, not diminishes it.
2. That is hard for people. And this is point number two. It is hard for us to understand a world of gift instead a world of punishment. We go through life wanting to know what someone did that was wrong so we can deal with them appropriately.

So, in our passage, we see the people take the next step after not being able to effectively assess blame and not being able to fully understand the gift. They went to

the authorities. They will know who is at fault, they thought. They will know who sinned. And the authorities did not disappoint them. It was Jesus! Jesus healed on the Sabbath and thus he is a sinner. But that didn't seem to work, and when the leadership couldn't come to agreement around that point, and when the healed man said that he believed Jesus was a prophet, they had to go to plan B before things got out of hand.

"If we can't blame Jesus, then surely it is this lying man in front of us. He never was blind. Get his parents in here to prove it." But that didn't work either.

Finally, when the healed blind man was defending, even proclaiming, Jesus, they had to label him a sinner since birth, not worthy to be listened to, and kick him out. Problem solved. Now everyone can get about their business.

3. But most of all, just like Paul was saying to the Ephesians, the passage is about light and darkness, spiritual clarity and confusion. The light given to the blind man was both the light of vision and the light of revelation. It brought him out from a life of existing in the darkness that had held him for his entire life only to discover, through his new expanded vision, through the revelation of light, that another type of darkness held grip on the world. It does the same for us.

When Jesus brings light to our world we are able to see both the beautiful sunset and colorful rainbows, as well as the dark clouds of the storms that plague us. One frees us, and equips us for action. The other challenges and calls us to mission. Lord Jesus, bring us light.

Amen.