

Gospel John 9:1-41

¹As he 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?"⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

Transforming Love **April 2, 2017**

Anna and I had the great pleasure of going to see the newest release of *Beauty and the Beast* last Sunday afternoon. It was beautiful and moving. I laughed and cried and we even applauded at the end. If you've forgotten the premise of the story let me remind you of it. Belle, who is a somewhat precocious and stubborn young lady is being held captive by a young prince who, because of his selfishness and conceit, was turned into a ferocious and terrifying beast by an enchantress. Belle initially can only see what is on the outside of this person and she is repelled and determined to escape his castle. The beast is surly and unkind and the spell he is under is such, that unless someone can learn to love him he will remain a beast the rest of his life. The clock is ticking. Of course, we all know that in the end the Beast and Belle learn to care deeply for each other and perhaps the turning point of that love is when he sets Belle free so that she may return home knowing that he is dooming himself. But she does return, and as he lies dying, she tells him that she loves him, and the spell is broken and he is transformed back into a prince, a prince who now sees the world and people differently.

I couldn't help but think how timely it was to see that movie just before preaching this text today. It reminded me that Jesus looks at the heart of a person and not what is on the outside. That's the theme of our reading from Samuel too. That God sees the heart of a person and even though we may have made a mess of our lives God can and does set us free with his transforming love. A story like this should certainly get us thinking about how we see others and how we judge and accept those whose pain and circumstances we don't fully understand.

Both of our readings this morning are about seeing things the way God sees them and not the way we normally look at things. Jesus saw a man...who was blind from birth. It is important, I think, to note the language here. Jesus saw a man...who was blind from birth. The others saw a blind beggar. One who was probably a sinner, one who was a burden on the system, one who couldn't contribute. The disciples of course want to dive into some sort of theological understanding of why he was blind. Whose fault was it? This was not an uncommon response in the time. It was generally believed that sin was the cause of misfortune and that if you are struggling either physically, emotionally, or financially it is due to some failure, or sin on your part, or the part of your parents. Something we still find ourselves doing. But Jesus saw, a child of God. A child in whom God's love is revealed as Jesus heals him and makes him whole. It reminds me of a story that I've shared before by pastor Steve Molin about a morning in late November at the Lutheran Church in White Lake North Dakota.

"As the members of the church arrived they noticed an apparently homeless beggar sitting on the front steps of the church, wearing tattered clothing, a wool cap pulled down over his eyes, and clutching a bottle in fingerless gloves. They had never seen anything quite like this in White Lake North Dakota. Most worshipers simply walked around the man, or stepped over him, as he sat there. Some muttered words of disapproval, and others suggested that the man move to another doorway before the Sunday School children arrived.

One member told the man, in no uncertain terms, that the Salvation Army in Minot was a more appropriate place to sleep it off. At one point, a kind woman brought the man a cup of hot coffee, but not one person asked the man to come in out of the cold, and certainly nobody invited him in to join them in worship. Imagine, then, the people's surprise during the Processional, when their homeless friend made his way into the pulpit took off his cap, and the people recognized that it was their pastor! Their pastor, Steven Molin, began his remarks that morning in this way: "I did not do this to embarrass you or to poke you in the eye. I did it to remind us that this is a person that Jesus loves, and he has called us to love him, too."

We see unfortunate people all the time. In the hospital, on the street begging, homeless, drunk, in jail, on the news, people from every walk of life. And we often can be heard saying “he or she is getting exactly what they deserve!” Or, “no wonder he’s like that, just look at the choices he’s made or the family he comes from. I’m not surprised!” We hear on the news of politicians saying that people on food assistance or those who want a living minimum wage are lazy and irresponsible. We have many in authority who think they see correctly, and maybe, just maybe, we are some of them?

We also hesitate to look at these people. We would rather, like the disciples and Pharisees and even his parents, look the other way or talk about his condition. Honestly, how often have you walked by someone that you knew was going to test your ability to love, and just not looked at them? I’m raising my hand on that one!

But Jesus grabs hold of the blind man and placing mud mixed with his spittle sends him to the pool of Siloam and he is healed. In this seeming act of ‘baptism with mud and water’ his sight is restored and not just his physical sight, which is miraculous in itself, but also his way of seeing the world and Gods working in it, and this is often what happens when we encounter Jesus. And this encounter can often cause others to exclude you and not trust your story. This certainly is what happened to this one man today. No one believed him. In fact, many didn’t recognize him from before. No one stood with him, not even his parents. The only one to come to his comfort is Jesus, who finds him and lets him know that he is loved and the man takes the next step in his transforming journey of faith and belief.

I’m convinced that every gospel writer had an audience in mind when they wrote. And I couldn’t help but think about those who might be reading this story originally. I think whoever wrote the Gospel of John knew that perhaps everyone in this new faith journey was like the man born blind. That they too had been blind to the ways of God’s love and grace in the world but now they see things differently. Now that they too have had a healing encounter with Jesus, they find themselves at odds with their Jewish brothers and sisters and at odds with the world. Jesus is always challenging our assumptions, isn’t he? They are excluded and challenged to tell others how it is that they are different now. How it is that they see things the way they do. And like the man born blind, they may only know that they don’t know how, but that once they were blind but now they see.

There is a delightful scene at the end of the Wizard of OZ, where the wizard has gotten into the hot air balloon and the ropes have come undone and he begins to float away. Dorothy, calls after him, “Come back, come back.” And he responds with my favorite line in the movie, “I can’t. I don’t know how it works!” Some Wizard he was! But I think this is true for us as well this morning. We know that something has changed because of our relationship with Jesus but sometimes there is no good way to explain it. That like Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and the man born blind, we have been given spirit and new birth, living water, new vision and understanding, but we don’t know how it works. We can only live into it with love and forgiveness and grace, believing that Jesus has come to give sight, and transform our lives into something we don’t quite understand. That we too can say that “I once was lost but now I’m found. I once was blind, but now I see.” That this is the story we share by our loving and living and seeing in the world.

Jesus said, “I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.” (John Peterson, The Message)

Someone once said to Helen Keller, "What a pity you have no sight!" Helen Keller replied, "Yes, but what a pity so many have sight but cannot see!" We can choose not to see. We can choose to dwell on the causes of a person’s distress or circumstances. We can argue that God is not present so we shouldn’t be either. We can distance ourselves from those who walk right in front of us or who we know to be in need. We can hide behind our certain beliefs and doctrines and use them as a shield to keep us safe. Or we can, like Jesus, open our eyes

and see the hurt and hunger for God's love all around us and respond. We can see past the 'beast' that may be on the surface and look to the heart. And I believe that when we respond in love transformation can happen.

We may not be able to do more than walk alongside someone in pain or distress. We may not be able to do more than laugh and cry together that life is difficult and challenging. We may not be able to do more than listen and learn from each other. But if we have seen Jesus and been filled with His Spirit then we have no choice but to follow and do as He did.

So who are you in the story this morning? Are you the ones who now can see? Or are you the ones who think they see already? How is your relationship with Jesus opening you up to seeing in new ways? And maybe you should be asking Jesus how you have been blind to important things in your life, and in the world you live and move and breathe in.

In the new Glory to God hymnal there is a beautiful hymn called **Light Dawns on a Weary World** and I'll close with one verse of that today. It goes like this,

*I Light dawns on a weary world
when eyes begin to see
all people's dignity.
Light dawns on a weary world:
the promised day of justice comes.*

*Refrain:
The trees shall clap their hands;
the dry lands, gush with springs;
the hills and mountains shall break forth with singing!
We shall go out in joy,
and be led forth in peace,
as all the world in wonder echoes shalom.*

May Jesus find you in your darkness and open your eyes to the wonder of his transforming love in the world. That you too may go out with joy, and be led forth in peace, as all the world in wonder echoes shalom. Let us pray.