

An Eye Opening Miracle

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Prayer of Illumination

Gracious God, illumine our hearts and minds
as the Scriptures are read and proclaimed,
so that by the power of your Holy Spirit
we may see what is good and right and true.
And seeing, help us to do what is pleasing to you,
so that your glory becomes visible in our words and deeds.
In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Background

Many New Testament scholars are in agreement that this morning's passage about the healing of the man born blind is the best crafted story in John's gospel. It also describes so well the significance of the work of Christ. Listen closely to the irony and role reversal of the once-blind man now seeing and those with physical sight becoming blind.

Scripture: John 9:1-41 (NRSVue)

As he walked 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 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We^[a] must work the works of him who sent me^[b] while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.

⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ 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, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means *Sent*). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ 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?"

⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am he."

¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ 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." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ 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." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ 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."

¹⁸ 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 ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹ 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." ²² His parents said this because

they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus^[c] to be the Messiah^[d] would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ 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." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ 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?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"^[e] ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir?^[f] Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord,^[g] I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with 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.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

SERMON – “An Eye Opening Miracle”



Eyesight might be the lion's most important sense. Lions have large eyes and long-sited vision. Lions can see six times better than humans in the dark. They have large pupils that can take in a lot of light. In fact, lions have a white stripe under each eye. The white stripes draw *more* light into their eyes.

Football and baseball players put black under their eyes to reflect light *away* from their eyes. Lions do the opposite with their white stripes. And so their eyes are designed to pick up and magnify faint light—not only sunlight, but light from the stars and from the moon. As pupils of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, we need to have eyes that take in the Light of the World, eyes that are wide open to receiving God's light, eyes that truly see others compassionately and receive and bring healing, eyes that recognize Jesus as not only a prophet, but the Son of Man come to earth.

In our gospel reading, Jesus not only miraculously healed a man born blind, but also gave him new and crisp spiritual perception. We also see how those who *thought* they had spiritual 20/20 vision actually had blind faith, or to put it more accurately, were totally in the dark. They couldn't or maybe just *wouldn't* perceive that Christ was doing God's works in the light of day before His impending crucifixion. We read that, "as Jesus walked by, He *saw* a man blind from birth." Jesus sees. He notices us. He doesn't ignore or see through us or walk by. Jesus sees, and He especially sees with the eyes of compassion those who are hurting. He doesn't turn a blind eye. He sees them and goes to them.

The disciples see too, but they see a *problem* more than a *person*. "Jesus, was this man born blind because of his sin or his parent's sin?" Neither. You're asking the wrong question.

The disciples saw a problem—
Jesus saw a possibility.
The disciples saw the visible—
Jesus saw the invisible.
The disciples assigned blame—
Jesus took responsibility and acted.

Like the disciples, we need to see our challenges, and the challenges around us, in a very different light. And Jesus, the *Light of the World*, sheds the light we need on these things.

Instead of playing the blame game, Jesus plays in the dirt. Jesus is a Messiah who is not afraid to get his hands dirty. He not only draws with his finger in the sand, He makes mud pies with His spit—and He lovingly applied His mud pie to the blind man’s face and healed him on the Sabbath. Yet another bad habit of Jesus.

It’s important to realize there’s more going on here than meets the eye. Jesus was re-enacting the Creation. In Genesis 2, the hand of God created Adam out of dirt. In John 9, the hand of God, revealed in Christ, recreated the man born blind out of mud. Christ fashioned him new eyes. With the eyes of faith, suffering has the potential to put a spotlight on what God can do. God’s grace—expressed in either healing or in the strength we are given as we wait for the ultimate healing—reveals powerful things: courage, beauty, endurance, and deep trust.

- See with the eyes of faith.
- Live life with wide-eyed wonder.
- Notice the works of God going on around us. Take your blinders off.
- Don’t shut your eyes to God’s truth, even when it’s surprising or different. Be humble.
- Stay open to the Spirit’s surprising activity—even if it doesn’t fit into your categories.
- Don’t go down rabbit trails of inessential controversies or rational explanations for sin or calamities.
- Ask God to help you see Jesus at work today who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
- Ask for the wisdom and discernment to judge with right judgment.
- Use the law to point you to Christ, not to point the finger at others.

In Salem, Massachusetts there was a recent mural that depicted a man in 17th century garb pointing his finger, exclaiming, “WITCH!!!” But what he failed to notice was that *his* complexion was green. He was projecting onto others what he himself embodied. We all need Christ’s healing touch, not just the other. We have the log in our eye, our neighbor has a speck of sawdust.

Something else to consider is that Jesus doesn’t necessarily make the messiness of our lives squeaky clean right away. Cleanliness isn’t always next to godliness. Jesus never asked the man born blind if he wanted to be healed. He just went up to him, spit in the ground, put the mud on his eyes, and sent him away to wash in the Pool of Siloam. He never even said he would be healed. And the man wasn’t healed until after he obeyed and washed. Naturally we want Jesus to tidy up our questions, doubts, challenges, problems, or obstacles—but He doesn’t always do this, at least right away. Sometimes Jesus creates even more of a mess than we had before. A Jesus with dirt under his nails uses the chaos and complexity of this world as raw material to do His healing work. Jesus makes His new creation out of the mud and chaos of our lives.

Life was so much easier for the man born blind BEFORE his healing. People did things for him before—now in many ways he was on his own. Now, formerly friendly neighbors doubt if He’s telling the truth. His parents rejected him. Pharisees kicked him out of the synagogue. Life is brighter and more alive with Christ, but it sure isn’t easier.

That's not to say there's a washing and a cleansing that Christ also does in our lives. The blind man's healing didn't happen all at once. It came a bit after Jesus muddied him up. Jesus sent the blind man to the Pool of Siloam. Siloam means "sent." Jesus, the One sent by the Father, sent the blind man to the Pool called "Sent." This is no accident that the name "Sent" is given to the pool. There's something healing that happens to us when we are sent out in mission where we participate with Christ in God's healing and living and cleansing works. Being in touch with our sent-ness helps wash away our fears, our selfishness, and our pride.

Fear blinds us to God's activity. Fear clouds our judgment and blurs our vision of others. Fear can scare the living daylights out of us. Just as the blind man was healed and became the seeing man after he washed, so those who claimed they could see were blinded by their arrogance and lack of faith. Like the Pharisees, we can become so fearful and protective of our airtight systems and assumptions about God, that we fail to recognize the miracles Christ is doing. Worshiping our concept of God is not worshiping God. Like the blind man's parents, we can be so consumed with fear about losing our social standing and respect in the community, that we brush our faith under the rug.

But it doesn't have to be this way. The healed man was made stronger in his faith by the messiness he encountered. He stuck to his story—even when he didn't have all the words to say. The more he testified before his people, the stronger his faith got. At first Jesus is just a man that he doesn't know much about. Then, the more he shares he realizes that Jesus is a prophet. And finally, when Jesus seeks him out and reveals Himself, the man proclaims Jesus as the Son of Man and worships Him. "I once was blind but now I see." Only those who recognize that they are blind can see. If we claim we can see, we are blind. Only when we admit that we are weak, can we be strong.

I love the last part of our gospel story. As soon as Jesus heard that the healed blind man had been expelled from the synagogue, He looked for him and searched for him and wouldn't stop until He found him.

Jesus seeks us out. He's on the lookout for us. When you feel rejected or alone, you can be sure Jesus is on the lookout for you. He will see you, find you, and He will reveal Himself to you. He'll touch you and send you, and us, out into service to continue the works of God.

Amen.

Sermon Art: "*Christ Healing a Blind Man*," Mid-12th-century mural from the Hermitage of San Baudelio de Berlanga (Soria), and now housed in the Cloisters Museum in New York.

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