

Written Copy: Believing is Seeing Thru God's Eyes-John 9:35-39

4th Sunday in Lent
Sunday, March 22nd, 2020

Text: John 9:35-39 (Greek Translation)

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out of the Synagogue, and after looking for him and finding him, He said, "Do you yourself believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ And that man answered by saying, "And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have looked upon Him, and the One who continues to speak with you, He is also that One." ³⁸ Then the man was saying, "Lord, I am believing!" And he fell on his knees and worshiped Him." ³⁹ And Jesus said, "For judgment I myself have come into this world, so that those who are not currently seeing may begin to see, and those who ones currently seeing may become blind people."

Exegetical Statement

Jesus encounters a man born blind. He corrects His disciples that this blindness is not caused by any particular sin but is going to be used to display the works of God and create faith in Him. From the mouth of the One who created all things and will restore all things He uses the means at hand to bring about miraculous healing. The people who knew this man as being blind from birth are incredulous as to how he can now see, some even suggesting that this is not the same man but a look alike. They and the Pharisees are disturbed because this healing happened of the Sabbath by the man Jesus who claims to be from God. But their narrow and legalistic interpretation of the Sabbath along with their sinful blindness will not allow them to see the truth. They all the man's parents, and interrogate him repeatedly, trying to get a different story that will fit their narrative that Jesus is a sin-filled man and not someone sent by God and working with His approval and power. They finally make good on the edict they had decided beforehand that anyone who calls Jesus the Christ must be cast out of the Synagogue and the company of those whom they considered to be believers in God. But Jesus searches, finds, and draws him out of the darkness that the Pharisees suffer and into the true Kingdom of God by bestowing faith and all that comes with it. Jesus then shares a word of Law for those who are still outside the kingdom. He tells them He was sent by the Father into the world for the purpose of judgement. All who refuse to believe in Him as the light of the world will be condemned to an eternity of darkness in hell. These are the ones who think they can see and know the truth but have turned a blind eye to Jesus who was sent as the divine embodiment of truth for all men.

Focus Statement:

The same God enfleshed who used the means at hand to restore physical sight and then used His divine power to open the spiritual eyes of the blind man wants to use the means at hand today to open the eyes of the spiritually blind and make them see Him through the eyes of faith. When we come to terms with our inability to save ourselves as the Spirit works through the Law preached and not preached, He shows Himself through the Gospel as the God who saves us now and for eternal life

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Our world is living through the COVID-19 Pandemic in blindness of the God who creates and sustains life. We Americans look to our health care system, our government, and our own ability to save ourselves; to stockpile enough to get us through the crisis. But the reality of the virus is opening our eyes to the fact that we don't have the power to guarantee we won't be infected. We deny and react by more stockpiling of stuff.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Through faith see this Pandemic not as something to fear but as Christ's opportunity to grow our faith and share it with others so that the Spirit might open their eyes too,

Subject Sentence: Believing is Seeing Through God's Eyes

This has been a very unsettling time for your Pastor. While I don't expect to always be preaching to a full house, looking out and seeing an almost empty church is a bit unsettling. And while I know people are watching on the internet either live or later on, since the video lives on our Facebook page after this service is over; nonetheless I can't see you. I can't see your faces, engage you by looking into your eyes. Maybe that's just as well. You're probably being distracted by when and where you should go to get more toilet paper.

And why toilet paper? There have been several theories advanced as to why this was the item people keyed in on as the COVID-19 began to make its way through our country. One is that it's a staple item. You can get by without Kleenex by using Paper Towels. You can get by without Paper Towels by using dish clothes that are washable. But you can't, or at least most of us, refuse to substitute something else for toilet paper. One post on Facebook that made me laugh showed a pile of leaves out in the yard with a sign that said 100% Organic Toilet Paper. \$50 or best offer.

But as you are well aware of, the hoarding has not been restricted to toilet paper. It moved on to eggs, orange juice, milk, and frozen vegetables. Whenever there is a rumor that stores may be running low on something everybody races to buy all that they can. This is simple human selfishness and sinfulness on display for all to see. People have been blinded, and cannot see the truth that the Lord is trying to show them, as well as to you and I. So, I believe our Gospel Lesson today has much to say to us, as well as all those hoarding in fear. In John chapter 9 we see Jesus dealing with a physical blindness. But at the same time this becomes a way for us to understand spiritual blindness, and how Jesus works to heal both.

The Lesson begins with Jesus encountering a man that was born blind. Jesus first teaches His disciples and us that bad things, such as blindness or even infectious plagues, are not always attributable to one person's sin, or even to the sins of a nation. Both birth defects like blindness and Pandemics can be attributed to the effects of the Fall upon the world, and mankind in general. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned imperfection of body and soul has entered humanity. Our gene pool has been affected. We are not as healthy as Adam and Eve were before the Fall; after all they were created to live forever. Sin is the virus that has infected our humanity body and soul. Along with that the ground, and the rest of Creation along with it was cursed by God as a consequence of sin. Nature now works against us rather than for us. COVID-19 is nature turning on us and working against us, and our bodies are no longer strong enough to deal adequately with it, despite all the advances of science.

So who can turn the tide and overcome what the Fall has cursed us with? Jesus. He demonstrates how God in human form can take the means at hand: dirt and spit and use them to perform a miracle that only God can do. It's how our God loves to work: through means; through the means at hand. Jesus makes mud and spreads it on the man's eyes. Then He directs him to use ordinary water to wash that mud off, thus completing the miraculous healing. He obeys Jesus directions, and when He comes back right away people

notice there is something remarkably different about him. They used to see him sitting and begging in the same spot year after year. But now, look at him! He is walking around with his sight restored. It's a miracle! And yet many cannot accept it. They look for any other explanation than the obvious one. This cannot be the man born blind! This is someone who looks a lot like him. When the man identifies himself as the one who used to be blind, the people incredulously ask how his sight was restored. The man correctly identifies Jesus as the miracle worker.

Now Jesus has been in Jerusalem and teaching at the Temple. He has been healing the lame, feeding 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish, casting out demons, and teaching God's Word with an authority that goes beyond any of the teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees. In fact just prior to this episode, John describes Jesus in the Temple with the Pharisees who are asking Him who He thinks He is, and by what authority He does what He does. He reveals to them the truth that they cannot see and do not want to see: that He has been sent by God, and in fact, He is God. He confesses to them that He is "the I AM" who existed before Abraham ever was. They understand He is calling Himself God, and they refuse so strongly the evidence of His testimony and His works that they pick up rocks to stone Him to death. The only reason they do not succeed in murdering Him right then and there is that it's not His time.

So when the formerly blind man identifies Jesus as the source of healing, they take him straightaway to the Pharisees. The Pharisees had already decided that anyone who believes Jesus is the Christ must be cast out of the Synagogue, and out of the company of those considered as good God-fearing Jews. And now here is another strike against Him: He is healing on the Sabbath! And that's a problem. Jesus is doing things that only God can do since no man blind from birth has ever regained his sight. Yet no man from God would ever work like this on the Sabbath, at least that's how the Pharisees and Scribes see it. And yet something happened to this man. So they prod and question, question and prod the man. They call his parents in and grill them to see if this man's former blindness was just a sham.

The formerly blind man may not be an expert in the Law, especially regarding the Sabbath. But he does know the truth about what has happened to him. He used to be blind but now he can see. God does not work through sinful people that break his laws on purpose, and yet He must be working through Jesus. This formerly blind man stands as proof. When the Pharisees find themselves backed up against the wall without any other explanation except that Jesus must be working through the power of God, they choose the only avenue open to them. They cast him out of their midst. They send him back into the status he had before: an undesirable sin-filled man who is outside the kingdom of God.

They do this because they too are blind. The man before them was once was physically blind but now can see. They are spiritually blind, not that they would ever admit it. The Pharisees and Scribes consider themselves to be men chosen by God to reveal the truth about Him and His kingdom to the people. They demand unquestioning respect as such. Out of jealousy, suspicion, and the inability to see the sin in their own lives, they cannot and

will not see who Jesus really is. They cannot see the signs that are His miracles and His teaching. They cannot see because they have been blinded by sin, and are lost in the darkness of unbelief.

The man who used to be blind has had his physical eyes open. He can see that Jesus is no ordinary man, but instead believes Him to be a prophet of God. This man is suffering from the same spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. But Jesus searches for Him and comes to Him in order to pull the curtains back. If Jesus had not come and sought him, he would've remained in spiritual darkness forever just like the Pharisees.

When Jesus finds him, He performs an even greater miracle than the restoration of physical sight. Jesus does what only God can do: opens his spiritual eyes to see Jesus as He really is; his Savior and Lord. Jesus came to you through His Word to do the same thing. He uses the Law not preached to show us that we don't have the answers for all our life's problems. He uses problems, and birth defects, and even viral plagues to make us see that we can't handle life on our own. Using the Law in His Word He breaks our proud hearts, and shows us that we deserve to be cast out of God's presence forever. But he doesn't leave us there. He comes to us in the Gospel. In Baptism the Holy Spirit calls us by name. He calls us to look to at Jesus. Through the gift of faith He opens our spiritual eyes to see what Jesus' death and resurrection means for us, both now and eternally.

He shows us that His suffering and death, which cost Him His life, was His gift of love to us so that our eyes could be open to see what He has earned for us. To see that He gave all He had, because God could not stand the thought of you and I being separated from Him forever. To prove to us that when bad things that happen to us in this life they are not God punishing us. Through faith we see in His Gospel Message that He has taken upon Himself all our punishment. Faith opens our spiritual eyes to see God not as our enemy, but our loving Father. A loving Father who uses Pandemics for His own purpose; to call the lost to faith, and to call the faithful to draw ever closer to Him. Jesus gives us His Spirit so that we might be reminded daily that He has called us out of the devil's kingdom of darkness and into His Father's kingdom of light. So that we might always know where you and I stand: as His precious forgiven children. Children who are protected now and are headed to the promised end His resurrection gives: eternal life in a place where birth defects, and Pandemics, and death no longer have any power over us. He grants us the gift of faith to see that even as the COVID-19 spreads, and those that are blind to the work of His Son panic, and hoard, and eventually die without faith.

Our world today is reacting to the Pandemic with the same eyes that the Pharisees had. They cannot see and understand that there is a God who is stronger than this virus, who is crying out to them to turn from their running in fear and hoarding and instead turn to Him, and His promises of love and hope. They cannot see this truth without the gift of faith. And that is where you and I as the Church come in.

Jesus loves us more than anyone else on this earth. He allows His Church to suffer through this Pandemic along with the lost world not out of anger or spite, but so that we might come alongside the unbelieving world, and be His voice calling out to them. Now, perhaps we can't stand physically with them, but as we live out our lives in their presence, we can demonstrate how we see the world and ourselves differently through the eyes of faith. We continue to seek comfort and strength in His Word and Sacrament through whatever means available. We do this by worshipping along with our brothers and sisters connected via electronic means, worshipping in our homes knowing the same Spirit is present with our them as with us; wherever and whenever they may be watching. We participate in the family Communion Time according to what is best for each of us, given our health status and the risk factors we have. We show love for the safety of others if we are not well, or could be severely harmed by contracting the virus. But at the same time we do not live in fear. We live confessing that if we are doing the will of our Lord Savior, who calls us to gather for worship, who makes His body and His blood available for all who can safely come, that He will protect us.

Through the means of grace we ask Him to open our eyes to see our lives as gifts from Him. Gifts that we are to treasure and not throw away lightly. But gifts that were given by Him on the day of our birth, knowing that there is day in the future for all of us when that life will end, and we will go to be with Him. Until then, we confess by faith that He has work for us to do. We seek His help, His strength, and His vision to see both to see what He would have us do and to receive the strength to do it. We live not in fear, but with great joy and hope, knowing that while things appear to be bad now, they are not out of His control. And that this time of Pandemic will not last forever. We live trusting in His promises that He grants us each day life now, forgiveness for all the times we let fear cloud our vision, and His continued presence for tomorrow and the next day. In prayer we ask Him how we might share this vision of the truth with a world around us who desperately needs to see and hear God's words of love and faith to them.

Hording toilet paper and other goods is only a distraction for the fear and dread society feels because it can see no Creator God who is above all disease and disasters. Or it can only see their god as a small god for whom COVID-19 is beyond His grasp. Or that see God as a vengeful god who is giving unbelieving America and the world what it deserves. But through the eyes of faith, we see our Lord and Savior still present in the world and in our lives. He opens our eyes to see His love expressed in His death and resurrection. We see His sacrifice on the cross as proof positive He will not let our life slip through His hands because of a virus. We see that our life now and whatever we may lose on this earth cannot compare with what He has to give us in eternal life. And we see our mission as His Church, planted here to call out to a world overcome by fear with words of faith from the Gospel. We understand that our Savior loves to work through means: be it saliva and mud, or bread and wine, or Words of Scripture written long ago. He works through our witness of faith to show them and us that He is stronger than any virus. May the LORD provide you with a strength and assurance that goes beyond what you see in the world. May He provide you

with faith and hope in Christ to carry you through this time of panic, and deliver you into the eternity yet to come. Amen.