

Written Copy: John 9:35-41 “Open the Eyes of Our Hearts”

4th Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 12th, 2023

Text: John 9:35-41

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."

The text's intent

Jesus reveals Himself to be the Savior of those lost in spiritual darkness, testifying that He was sent by God to be the Messiah through His works and words. The disciples don't see a man in need of healing but a point of theological discussion about why some are afflicted. Jesus explains this is happening so that God can be glorified through Him. He does a miraculous sign using the common element mud to heal supernaturally. But many who clearly see a miracle has taken place will not believe it because of the darkness in their hearts. The Pharisees, who should see what happened as testimony to who Jesus is, refuse to see and believe because they have already decided Jesus cannot be the Messiah, and anyone who says He is will be thrown out of the synagogue. Instead of rejoicing with this man who was miraculously healed, or seeing his healer as the One sent by God, they see him as a threat. When they can't bring him into their darkness of unbelief, they cast him out. But Jesus comes to him and finishes the job of restoration by granting him the illumination of faith in his heart to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Jesus states to all that He came to give the light of faith to those blinded by sin, and those who refuse Him remain in the darkness of sin, to be cast into the outer darkness of eternal damnation on judgment day.

Focus Statement:

Jesus came to be the light of God that illuminates and changes sin darkened hearts through the gift of faith. He comes to heal the body and the soul, coming through every day means that no one would otherwise expect like Scripture, water, bread & wine, and accomplishes the miraculous work of conversion and justification. He came to take all our sinful darkness from us and remove it through His death on the cross and give to us the light and promise of the resurrection.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Like the disciples our hearts can become sinfully darkened to the need of those around us. We can be blinded to the work of our Lord through everyday means, and the miraculous powerful work He can do through sinful broken means like us

What the hearer should do as a result:

Make use of the means by which Christ enlightens our hearts by increasing our faith in Him and our ability to see others and love others as He does.

Subject Sentence: Jesus opens our eyes to His work of restoration

Introduction: Blind to the Obvious

I'm sure you've had the experience before. You're in a rush to get out the door. You're surprised by the snow that fell the night before and now it will take extra time to clean off the car, get it warmed up so that the windows won't fog or freeze up, let alone navigate on roads that might be kind of slippery. You need to get the car started to warm up while you finish getting ready; but where are the keys??!! You always put them right there on the dresser! But they're not there! You furtively look at all the places that you might have left them, but they are nowhere to be found. You ask your spouse, but they haven't seen them. Yet you secretly wonder if it wasn't them who took them and left them in the wrong place. Finally, after too much time wasted, your eyes catch something on the dresser. And it's your keys. They were there all along. Just a little bit removed from their usual spot. Or maybe hidden under some paper you set down earlier.

The same thing can happen with the cell phone. I don't know how many times I've set my cell phone down and forgot where. I look in all the places I've been, but I don't see it. Finally, I must have Susan or someone else call it, and then there it is right in front of me, with the stuff I wanted to take with me out to the car. It's not even hidden from view. It's there, I just couldn't see it.

Such is the case in our Gospel Lesson today. Many of our cast of characters are blind to the obvious, except for Jesus. He comes to restore our sight to that which we would otherwise remain blind to.

Blind to the Sign of God's Power at Work

The first in our cast of characters to be blind to the obvious are the disciples. As they are walking through Jerusalem with Jesus, they encounter a beggar who was born blind. Imagine what his life has been like, not being unable to work because he can't see and must resort to being a beggar, and how others see him as a nuisance. But this man has never seen the beauty of a sunrise, the snow on the mountain peaks, the sky filled with stars, or the faces of his mom and dad. The disciples miss all that. Instead, they see him as the object and opportunity for a theological discussion with Jesus about why people are afflicted with such things as blindness. Speaking about the man in the third person, (*perhaps even within his hearing, since many who are blind make up for it in the heightening of other senses*), they say, "Hey Jesus, why was this man born blind? Was it his sin that caused it? And if he was blind when he was born, when did he sin? Or was it his parents that sinned? (*Keeping in mind of course that in the book of Ezekiel it says each man will suffer for his own sins*).

Jesus doesn't exactly see this as an opportunity for theological discussion. But He does straighten out and illuminate the darkness of misunderstanding in their hearts and minds regarding why this man was born blind. Afflictions like this that come upon mankind are not always the direct result of sin, other than the fact that we live in a sinful broken world where nothing works as it was designed to. And those misfortunes that are allowed to happen are used by God for His glory, which is the very reason why this man has been blind from birth.

Then to prove this point Jesus heals the man. He does so by using something very simple and plain, something that no one would ever expect to be used to heal blindness: mud. Jesus spits and makes mud and smears it over the eyelids of the blind man. Why? Well, it's the perfect object lesson, the perfect illustration for a man that can't see that what is about to happen, but through this knows that whatever does happen is by the hand of Jesus. And the blind man shows that he's already been given something: some illumination in his mind, the power to believe that if he follows Jesus' directions and goes to wash in the pool of Siloam (*whose very name carries the idea of one commissioned as a messenger, such as an Apostle*) something good may happen. And something totally miraculous does happen, this man who had been blind from birth can now see! The darkness of his blindness has been removed!

This brings us to some other characters in this drama who are blind to the obvious, the formerly blind man's friends and neighbors. Some of them who should know who this man is, and know that he was blind since birth, now no longer seem to know him. And it's not that he looks different, they just can't accept the miracle that has happened. Even though it's obvious, they refuse to acknowledge it. Instead, they come up with the lame excuse that it's just someone who looks an awful lot like him, and is dressed like him, and talks like him, and lives in his house. But there are those who can't buy into this lame excuse, they know and admit the truth that this is the same man. So there is a division among them that causes them to lead this man to the Pharisees for answers.

Now they bring this man to those who are experts and authorities on the working of God, not just to tell them about this unbelievable event, but to get their take on the one who supposedly did it. If this Jesus really restored sight to a man born blind, then He might be the Messiah. But, not according to the Pharisees. They too are divided at first because this miracle, if it really happened, could only be done by the working of God. And there lies the problem. The Pharisees had already decided that Jesus could not be the Messiah, couldn't be the Christ, is not the One sent by God. And anyone who confesses He is will end up being thrown out of the synagogue and cast out of society.

And there's this too, He made the mud and healed the man on the Sabbath. That makes Him a lawbreaker. Yet here is a law breaker doing what only God can do. Stumped and at an impasse they turn to the formerly blind man and asked him. But he is of no help to them. He says what they don't want to hear, that Jesus is a prophet, meaning He is from God. Even in the eyes of the man who used to be blind, Jesus is doing the works of God Himself. But these religious leaders are too blind to see it.

The only recourse they have in order to save face is to discredit his being blind from birth. They summon his parents looking to have them testify that this man most certainly wasn't born blind. After all, they reason, how could he be. There's no way Jesus could've actually performed this miracle. But the parents can't play along, they know he was. Well then, the Pharisees ask, if that's the case how then is he now seeing? In other words, how can you be telling the truth if he now sees? The parents know if they confess who Jesus appears to be, they will be cast out of the synagogue and no longer be accepted by society. They respond, "We don't know how his sight was restored. But he's the one who it happened to; he is old enough to answer for himself. Ask him."

So, they summon again the man formerly blind and try to twist his arm. They say "Give glory to God! Tell the truth! We know this Jesus is a sinner; agree with us that He is. The formerly blind man responds with these beautiful words of faith: **John 9:25 He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."** With hearts filled with unbelief that would not allow them to see or hear the truth the Pharisees counter with "How did He do such a thing!" It's at this point that this formerly blind man shows he can see and discern spiritual truths that these religious leaders have blinded themselves to. **John 9:27 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?"** A nice little dig on his part. And it works. It draws blood. And the Pharisees, instead of rejoicing and praising God for this miracle begin berating and verbally abusing him.

But this formerly blind beggar isn't finished yet. Even though he has not been trained in the Scriptures as they have, he takes them to school with godly wisdom that should've opened their eyes. **John 9:31-33 ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.** If he's doing the works that only God can do, He must be from God, and more than that God must be with Him. And that of course is the last straw. They are not going to allow this man who is obviously a sinner and is a disciple of Jesus who has shown Himself to be a sinner, to try to teach them anything. They end the problem by refusing to see the truth, and instead cast the man out.

The One Who Came to Restore the Light of God in Hearts

It is at this point that Jesus comes to him. The man has been cast out of the synagogue of darkness and unbelief. Jesus once again comes to perform an even greater miracle: the miracle of conversion. **John 9:35-38** ³⁵ **Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”** ³⁶ **He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”** ³⁷ **Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”** ³⁸ **He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.** Now the formerly blind man’s spiritual eyes are open to see Jesus as He really is, not just as someone from God, but as the Lord and Savior. As **his** Lord and Savior.

Jesus tells those gathered around witnessing this, as well as we who are blessed to read it as part of Scripture, that is the reason why He came. Yes, He performed many miracles of healing of the body, including the restoration of physical sight. But He came to restore something much more important: our spiritual sight, that we might know who God really is by knowing who Jesus really is.

Only by Jesus powerful working can the darkness we were all born into, which is the same darkness the disciples and the Pharisees suffered from, the darkness of sinful unbelief, be lifted. He came to break the power of that darkness over your hearts and your minds by the liberating power of His life, death, and resurrection. He takes from you the sinfulness that perpetuates that unbelief and removes it forever by taking it upon Himself and taking it to the cross where its power over you is broken forever. And in His resurrection, you have the sure and certain promise of a new life now, with enlightened spiritual eyes to see Jesus for who He really is. You are given the power of faith to see Him as the love and mercy of God in action, calling you to faith, opening your eyes to the truth of not only who Jesus is as the Son of God, but who you are as His precious child.

Being His means to Restore Others

Out of His great love for that man born blind He came to Him and gave to Him the light of faith to see Him for who He really is. By that same love He has come to you. He came to you in your baptism and gave you the enlightenment of faith by the Holy Spirit. He continues to come to you in His Word. He comes when our minds begin to be clouded over by sin and restores the light of faith in them. He continues to come in His Sacrament to do this work of dispelling sinful darkness and replacing it with the light of faith in you through His presence in the bread and wine. He continues to come and call out to you, so that He can call you on the Last Day to join with Him in the eternal light of the resurrection.

He wants to do this not just for you, but those you come in contact with every day. He wants you, through the light of your Gospel Witness, to be His simple means to open the spiritual eyes of those who are lost in the darkness of unbelief. We can seem a lot like mud, dirtied with sin, and not very useful to open the eyes of anyone. But in the hands of the Spirit, we are mud that can do some amazing things. His light of faith working through the Gospel Message of His death and resurrection is a powerful means, a powerful force in the hands of the powerful Holy Spirit. He turned the hearts and minds of some of those Pharisees who did not believe in Jesus at this time into believers after His resurrection. He has done powerful work in my life. Imagine what He can do through you in the lives of those you may have written off, like the disciples had that man whom Jesus restored physically and spiritually.

Conclusion

Certainly, it is Jesus at work when we need help finding our keys or our phone. We are encouraged to call out to Him for any and every need no matter how small it may be. How much more so should we look to Him and allow His Spirit to work in us to keep our hearts and minds enlightened by faith? How much more important is it to be the light of faith right now to those lost in darkness while we still have the chance? It's the work Jesus came to do. May he continue that work in you, and me, and in those we come in contact with now and unto life everlasting. Open the eyes of our hearts Lord! We want to see you always. High and lifted up, as our Lord and Savior. Amen.