

“He Put Mud on My Eyes”

1 Samuel 16:1-13 • Psalm 23 • Ephesians 5:8-14 • John 9:1-41

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March 19, 2023

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Two weeks ago I talked about Nicodemus; last week it was the Samaritan woman at the well; today it is the man born blind. All three of these people had significant conversations with Jesus that left them *radically* changed. In each case, *faith* formed in the hearts of these very different people. Jesus can touch the heart of an esteemed Jewish rabbi, just as much as he can touch the heart of a woman with a checkered history from a marginalized people, just as much as he can touch the heart of a blind beggar who gets kicked out of his faith community. Just as much as he can touch *your* heart, and *mine*. No matter where you are in life, in society, or in your faith, *Jesus can find you and love you*.

The story begins like this: “As he 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?’” The disciples are making assumptions. We have a habit of making assumptions, don’t we, when we encounter people who are less able-bodied and less fortunate than we are. We see someone who is blind, or deaf, or is missing an arm or a leg, or is handicapped in some other way, and we just start making assumptions. We make even *more* assumptions when that person is begging for food or for money – which, we learn in verse 8, is precisely what this man was doing. He’s blind, *and* he’s a beggar. If you were to encounter a blind beggar in the city streets, what kind of assumptions would you make? If this person asked you for money, how would you respond? Give them some change out of your pocket? Walk on by? Try to direct them to organizations that might be able to help? Jesus’s disciples think this man is a curiosity. There’s no indication they were going to do anything. They just want to *talk* about him. “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” They assume that his blindness is a punishment from God, as a result either of his own sins or the sins of his parents.

But sometimes our assumptions are just plain wrong. “Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.’” Sometimes God has a purpose for our lives that is not at all obvious. This man could have been utterly forgotten to history. But we still talk about him twenty centuries later because of what Jesus did – and how he responded. “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day,” says Jesus; “night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Jesus is about to bring *light* to the darkness of this man’s life. *Physical* light – and also *spiritual* light.

“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.” The mud was not necessary; Jesus performs many other healings without mud. But this recalls what God did when he created man, back in the very beginning: “the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” As God brought life to the first human, so Jesus brings life to this blind man.

“Go,” says Jesus; “wash in the pool of Siloam.” This pool is mentioned in the Old Testament and in other ancient sources; it had been built by King Hezekiah about eight hundred years before Jesus and was located in the lower part of the city of Jerusalem. It was a reservoir for fresh water that came through a tunnel from a natural spring just outside Jerusalem. That reservoir of water made it possible for people to *live* in Jerusalem. Some biblical scholars think it may have also been used for ritual purification. This blind beggar didn’t need ritual purification. He needed something ... *more*.

The man does as Jesus instructs him. “Then he went and washed and came back able to see.” John states it so matter-of-factly, but this was a *watershed* moment in this man’s life! People are amazed. “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Yes, indeed, it’s the same man. People want to know how it happened. “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 want to know: “Where is he?” Where is the man who healed you? But the beggar does not know. Jesus is nowhere to be found.

Something this significant merits the attention of the religious leaders. The man is brought before the Pharisees. They are more concerned about the fact that it is the Sabbath day than the fact that this man has just received a miraculous healing. Their attention is focused on the wrong thing. Some of them conclude that Jesus “is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others are a bit more charitable. “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” In their confusion they ask the beggar: “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replies: “He is a prophet.” Not just a *man*, but a *prophet*. This man has taken the first step on his spiritual journey.

Some of the Jews don’t believe that a miracle has really happened. They go to the man’s parents. “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” The parents reply: yes, this is our son; yes, he was born blind; no, we don’t know how he regained his sight. “Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” It’s a straightforward answer, but it’s not quite honest. It appears they *did* know who healed their son. They lied. Why? Because they were *afraid*. John tells us: “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.” They were afraid they would be excommunicated. Never allowed to worship in their synagogue ever again.

Let’s be clear here. Religious leaders should go about their business in ways that inspire people to be *honest*. Not put such fear into their hearts that they have to *lie* to protect themselves!

They go back to the beggar and question him a second time. “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” That is to say: *tell us what we want to hear*. We’ve got *God* on our side. But this man who has come to see (in a physical sense) and is coming to see (in a spiritual sense) is not going to lie like his parents did. He’s going to tell them the truth – whatever the cost. “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They are not satisfied with this answer. “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” “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?” Ah – *disciples*. This man has taken another step on his spiritual journey. He is now recognizing that Jesus doesn’t just *heal* people. He’s also someone worth *following*. The religious leaders reply: “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.” Nice job, folks. Way to stay stuck in your tradition. Deny the all-too-obvious reality that Jesus was sent by God and is doing God’s work in the world. The man is amazed at their inability or unwillingness to see the truth. “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, 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.” Preach it, brother, *preach it!* Tell them the *truth!* The *only* explanation for why Jesus is able to heal him is that he *must* have come from God. This man has just taken another step – or two – in his spiritual journey. *He* knows where Jesus came from, even if *they* refuse to believe. And he’s now got the courage and the willingness to say that *boldly* and *clearly*.

But they will have none of that. “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And “they drove him out.” They kick him out of the synagogue. He’s gained his sight, he’s gained wisdom, and now he’s *lost* his faith community. Or ... maybe he’s losing one ... to gain *another*.

Word spreads. “Jesus heard that they had driven him out.” Probably Jesus knew that that was inevitable. The things Jesus is doing are causing people to choose sides. Are people *with* him, or are they *against* him? Remember what Jesus said at the beginning: “he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” God is doing something *big* in this man’s life. Either people can see it, or they can’t. But now this man has lost his faith community. Jesus comes to us when we are in need, like this man was at the beginning of this story. But Jesus *also* comes to us when we are lonely, or hurt, or rejected. So Jesus goes in search of this man again. “When he found him he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’” After everything this man has been through, after everything he has come to realize about the man who healed him, is he ready to acknowledge who Jesus *really* is?

The man needs just a little more clarification. He asks: “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” *Oh, he’s so close!* He’s right on the edge, right on the cusp of full faith in Jesus! “Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’” That’s the clincher; that was the final piece the man needed to hear. “He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped him.”

That word “worship” – do you know what it means? Merriam-Webster says it means “to honor or show reverence for as a divine being or supernatural power” or “to regard with great or extravagant respect, honor, or devotion.” In Greek, the word meant to *kiss the hand*, like a dog licking its master’s hand, an act of reverence and great appreciation; or to *fall upon one’s knees and touch the ground with one’s forehead*, as an expression of profound reverence. This is what we do here. We’re *kissing the hand* of Jesus, our Master. We’re *falling upon our knees, all the way down*, to show our profound reverence for God. This is what this man now does when he comes to full faith in Jesus. He *worships* him. He bows down, prostrates himself, acknowledges Jesus as his Master and Lord.

“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.’” *Judgment* has to do with a *decision*. A *verdict*. In John, it refers to the judgment, the verdict, that *we* make about *Jesus*. Do we, or do we not, acknowledge him for *who he really is*? The judgment leads to a *result*: “so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.” The blind beggar has *come to see*, both literally and also figuratively. He has come to a *decision*, a *verdict*; he has rendered a *judgment*. Jesus is a prophet, someone worthy of following, someone who has come from God, the Son of Man, the Messiah, his Master and Lord.

But what about the religious leaders, the Pharisees, the people who kicked the man out of the synagogue, the people who condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath? “Surely,” they ask Jesus, “we are not blind, are we?” Jesus answers: “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.” They have made their choice. They remain stuck in their blindness.

And what about you? What verdict have you rendered about Jesus? *Do you truly see?*

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