

“Now I See”

Meditation on John 9 (Selected verses)

March 26, 2017

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

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*9As Jesus 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.’ 13 They 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.’ 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 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; 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. ...' <sup>22</sup>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... <sup>24</sup>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.'<sup>25</sup>He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.'*

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On Thursday, a group of about 40 children and adults gathered in Cocoa to pack and wrap food to feed needy children. The Children's Hunger Project of Brevard County provides food every Friday to hundreds of young children in local schools who may not otherwise have enough nutritious food to eat on the weekend.

Elaine Kicklighter organized the hands-on mission event for our church. She welcomed and guided volunteers with her handmade sign. Supervisors provided step-by-step instructions on how to pack and wrap and trained several people to be "runners." They did a great job! It felt good to be working together on a shared mission to our community. We talked and laughed as we wrapped, packed and stacked. Time just flew by.

The Children's Hunger Project goal is to feed every hungry or undernourished elementary school age child in the county, one at a time. Volunteers delivered about 56,000 food packages to schools for children's backpacks in the 2015-16 school year. They would like to be able to feed even more. They rely on donations from individuals, businesses and other community groups, including our congregation.

A March 9 article in the *Washington Post* says “more than 13 million kids in this country go to school hungry.” One in 5 children in the U.S. live in “food insecure households,” lacking “consistent access to enough food.” Other estimates are as high as 15 million hungry kids, with one in 4 living in food insecure households. “Kids who go to school hungry may suffer an inability to concentrate and ... fall behind academically. Hungry kids are more likely to miss school because of illness,” suffer from depression and anxiety, and develop behavioral problems as teenagers. “They are more liable to drop out before graduation, which leads to lower paying jobs and a greater probability of being food insecure adults.” The *Washington Post* article discusses a children’s backpack program called “End 68 Hours of Hunger.” It started with one mother, Claire Bloom, who saw a need to feed kids on the weekends. Claire, who lives in the affluent town of Dover, New Hampshire, was at a book club meeting in 2010 when a teacher mentioned that she had students who went from lunch on Friday to breakfast on Monday with nothing to eat. “I was appalled; absolutely stunned and appalled,” Claire said.

Her eyes were opened to a poverty she never knew existed in her community. And she felt compelled to do something about it.

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Our reading in John brings to light some of the suffering and need in Jesus’s day. He and his disciples leave the temple in Jerusalem and pass a beggar, blind since birth. A man with such an affliction would be unclean and have little choice but to live in poverty and beg for food.

The disciples ask, “Rabbi, who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind?” Thus begins a story that reveals the darkness and ignorance of the religious leaders and the love and compassion of the Lord, the “light of the world,” for those whom society deems worthless or simply a burden. Such compassion is a sign of God’s Kingdom drawing near and the arrival of the one who is to come. Jesus says in Matthew 11:5-6, when John’s disciples ask Jesus if he is the Messiah, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

These acts of mercy and miracles of healing are lifted up as the ministry of Christ’s followers in Matthew 10:7 when Jesus sends out the 12 disciples on a mission. “As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.”

Now in John’s gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that the man who was born blind is blind not because of sin, but so that God’s works would be revealed in him (9:3). This foreshadows an even more startling miracle to come--the raising of Lazarus from the dead in John 11. In making clay from his spit and dirt and applying it to eyes blind since birth we are taken back, perhaps, to the creation of the first human being in Gen. 2:7 from the dust of the earth.

A number of details in this passage stand out as important and different than other healing accounts. First, the beggar doesn’t ask to be healed; nor does he seem to know him. Christ comes to him, uninvited,

applies the clay/spittle mixture to his eyes, and tells him to “wash in the pool of Siloam,” without promising that this act will bring healing. This detail may bring to mind the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:10-14, a war hero who had leprosy. Unlike the prideful Naaman, the unnamed blind man is humble and quick to obey Jesus without question or protest. The reward is a miracle that the Pharisees and many of the Jewish community do not want to acknowledge. For they have called the blind man a sinner, undeserving of God’s blessing. And they call Jesus a sinner, too, because he breaks the law; he has made mud to heal a man on the Sabbath (v. 14). And this isn’t the first time he has healed on the Sabbath; in John 5, he heals on the Sabbath a paralyzed man lying by a pool by the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. He had been ill for 38 years.

With the healing of the blind man in ch. 9, the Pharisees investigate as if they are attempting to solve a crime. They interrogate the man’s parents, who only admit that he is their son for fear they will be shunned by their community of faith. The Pharisees then demand that the beggar to tell them how Jesus “opened his eyes.” They use this expression to mean physical healing. But the expression is also used for spiritual illumination. When the disciples are walking with the risen Christ in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus, they don’t know that it is he, until they sit down to share a meal. Jesus breaks the bread and their eyes are “opened” and they recognize him.

The beggar of John 9, who will soon experience spiritual illumination, along with physical healing, responds bravely to the Pharisees’ questions. “The one thing I do know, he says, “is that though I was blind, now I see.”

Later, the Pharisees will become angry with him and drive him out of the community.

Jesus then seeks the man out and asks, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'

The man answers, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."

"You have seen him," Jesus says. "The one who is speaking with you is he.'

"Lord," the man responds, "I believe."

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Studying our gospel this week, I find it particularly meaningful that of all the people the Lord could have chosen to reveal his identity, he chose the lowly, humble, despised and rejected. He chose a blind man persecuted his entire life for sins he did not commit. He chose a man who, when Jesus put clay and spit on his eyes and told him to go wash in a pool, he did it without question or protest, without knowing that his act of obedience would heal him.

Thousands of years later, Christ has revealed His divinity to us. Do we have Christ's heart of compassion for the poor, sick, despised and rejected? If so, that compassion should stir us to continual acts of mercy and kindness. It should flow out of our hearts and shape the words we say and the decisions we make every day. Christ's compassion should compel us to seek to change the structures and systems in our society that reward the arrogant and powerful and neglect the needs of the

poor and the sick. How should we respond, friends, as the Church of Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Let us ask God to open our eyes that we may truly *see*--and respond, "Lord, I believe!"

Let us pray. Open our eyes, Lord, so that we see the world with your eternal vision. Spirit, fill our hearts with love that will transform us and flow into every aspect of our lives--shaping our actions, words, relationships, and decisions. Forgive us for refusing to see what you desire us to see--the broken places in us that you want to heal, the hidden sins we are ashamed to confess, the burdens we carry that you want us to let go so that we may be free to walk in your ways.

Strengthen us to humbly obey your commands, like the man who was born blind, but could see better than the rich, pious and powerful of his time. Help us to work for change in our society so that the needs of the poor, sick and despised will not be neglected. Keep us in your tender care, Good Shepherd. Lead us to live in peace and unity. In Christ we pray. Amen.