

The Way of Life: Light from Darkness
John 9:1-12
Sunday, March 15, 2026 | Fourth Sunday in Lent

We've all got our favorite Bible stories, and this is one of mine. I absolutely love this story.

So, it starts out with a question that may sound kind of familiar. "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind." In asking this question, Jesus' disciples were simply stating something that most everyone in that day and age believed: that curses—like blindness ... and sickness and in general, and poverty, and homelessness, were the result of sin. The people of that day held a "cause and effect" view of God. If you pleased God, God would reward you. If you sinned and displeased God, God would punish you. This view was so ingrained that many people assumed, as Jesus' disciples say, that even an unborn fetus could somehow sin, resulting in blindness.

And the reason I say the disciples' question may sound familiar is that many people today believe the same thing. We may not be quite as hardcore. We'd be willing to allow that someone with a birth disability isn't responsible for it. But many of us might well wonder what the mother did during her pregnancy to cause it. Many of us tend to assume that if someone is sick, or poor, or unhoused, it's because of some sort of moral failure, without looking too closely at the systemic evil that lead to so many of the curses that people experience today.

But in today's scripture, Jesus lays this belief system definitively to rest. He says that neither the fetus nor the parents sinned. Now, he isn't saying that sinful choices never lead to bad outcomes. He's just saying we can't assume that's the case. As Jesus says elsewhere, it rains on the good and the bad alike. Bad things sometimes happen to good people. They sometimes just

happen for reasons entirely beyond our control, and we ourselves sin when we assume it's necessarily because of some individual moral failure.

But the bad things aren't the end of the story. The man's blindness isn't the end of his story. Because in this story, Jesus is also saying that God can use anything—even congenital blindness—to glorify God ... to bring the light of God's love into the world.

And just in case the disciples might have missed the point, Jesus makes it concrete. He gives sight to the man who had been born blind. He takes the man out of the darkness he had been living in for his entire life, and he shows him the light.

And not just the light of the sun. Not just physical light. He also shows him the light of the SON. Just as Jesus last week told the Samaritan woman he was the source of living water, in today's story he tells his disciples (and presumably the man who had been born blind) that he is the light of the world; he is the light of God's presence—God's Spirit—in the world. He is the one who reveals through his life and his work who God is. He is the one who enlightens life with true, abundant, eternal life.

And, if you read the rest of the story, all the way to the end of chapter 9, you'll see this play out in the life of the man who had been born blind. At first, his neighbors ask who restored his sight and all he knows to say is, "the man named Jesus." At that point, he hasn't even seen Jesus.

Later, under questioning from the Pharisees, he says Jesus is a prophet. Then, even later, under further question, he asserts "if this man wasn't from God, he couldn't [have healed me]."

And then, he finally meets Jesus and when he does, he worships him, declaring him Lord, and saying, "Lord, I believe."

The man progresses from a spiritual blindness just as profound as his physical blindness. And then, once Jesus opens his eyes and the spiritual light of Jesus has the opportunity to work in his life, he progresses to the point where he worships Jesus as Lord.

And when you think about it, that's kind of the way it works in so many of our lives. Now, there are some of us who have been able to bask in the glow of Jesus' light our whole lives.

But there are others who have walked the path of this man. I'm one of those people. I spent the first 40 or so years of my life blind; not physically, I could see fine. But I was blind to Jesus. I saw no need for God or Jesus. Then, my eyes were opened. I saw Jesus' light, but only dimly. I knew the basics about who Jesus was, but not much more. Over time, through worship, study of scripture, service, and lots of other spiritual practices I grew to see Jesus more and more clearly. My eyes have been opened and now, like the man who was born blind, I can confess Jesus as my Lord.

Of course, that's not the end of my journey. I hope for myself and all of us that our view of Jesus will continue to improve; that I and all of us will over time become more and more like him.

But this story isn't just about bringing light from darkness. It isn't just about a blind man seeing. Part of the brilliance of this story is it's also about those who think they can see progressively blinding themselves to who Jesus is.

As the man who had been born blind himself observes, the miracle Jesus performs in this story is unprecedented. There was no record of anyone ever being cured of congenital blindness. In performing this miracle, Jesus has proven himself to have power beyond anything anyone had ever heard of. In fact, he had once again proven himself God's son, the Jewish Messiah.

But, as we read on in chapter 9, we see that the Pharisees refused to see it.

So far this Lent, we've talked about how Jesus came into the world as the Messiah, the king and savior, but how he is going to be a different kind of king—a different kind of savior—than everyone expects.

He isn't going to ride in on a war horse with an army at his back to take back the world for God. Instead, his kingdom consists in what he calls born-again, eternal life; new life lived in God's eternal love.

And we talked last week about how that new and eternal life isn't limited to just one tribe, nation, or race, but is available to everyone, even—and maybe even especially—those we least expect, like a village full of Samaritans.

But here's the thing. Not everyone is happy about Jesus' different-ness. Those who thought they knew everything about God—the priests, the Pharisees, the Scribes—began to feel threatened. Jesus seemed to be saying they were wrong, and that if they wanted to get into God's kingdom, they were going to have to change their entire belief system. They didn't like that, and so, as a group, they began to dig in their heels in opposition to Jesus. And it didn't

matter how many miracles Jesus did, or how spectacular they were. Nothing was going to change their minds.

And that's what we see going on in the rest of this story. Once the local Pharisees learn this man had been healed, they open an investigation to understand what has happened. As it turns out, the healing took place on the Sabbath. And so, they use the fact that Jesus did work on the Sabbath as a way to close their eyes to who Jesus was. In their calculus, his breaking of the Sabbath rules was more important than giving sight to a man who had been born blind.

As far as they're concerned, they know how the Messiah is going to behave and it isn't going to involve doing miracles on the Sabbath. It isn't going to involve challenging their authority or their belief systems. Their increasingly desperate attempts to protect themselves by ignoring who Jesus really is get so ridiculous that as the story ends, Jesus points out that while his presence has given sight to the man born blind, it appears to have also resulted in the Pharisees, who figured they could see just fine, going blind.

As Jesus says here, he is the light of the world. And while strong light can powerfully illuminate reality, it can also blind us (or, as we see in this story, reveal our blindness). Just as he did to both the man born blind and the Pharisees in this story, Jesus presents *us* with a choice. We can choose to see him as he is—as the personification of divine love—or we can blind ourselves to his reality in order to follow some other would-be Messiah. It might be money, it might be power, it might be acclaim, it might be comfort and security.

You can choose to close our eyes to him. Or you can choose to allow Jesus to turn *your* darkness into the light of his love. It's your choice. Choose wisely.

