

Title: Lord, Help Me See

Text: John 9:1-41

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Martin Luther King Jr., in his famous “I Have a Dream” sermon, spoke about a world that did not yet exist. In his words, he opened our eyes to God’s kingdom where justice would run deeper than prejudice and dignity would not depend on the color of a person’s skin. He knew our journey was not finished, but like Moses, he stood on the mountaintop and looked into the horizon, and yes, I believe he saw it. He could see where others could not. He said:

“I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.”

King could see something others could not yet see. Which raises a question for us. What does it mean to see the world the way God sees it? And perhaps the more unsettling question is this: How would we know if we were the ones not seeing clearly?

Because scripture keeps returning to this theme, again and again, this strange mystery about sight. Today’s journey will focus on John’s gospel, but I believe Matthew’s “Be Attitudes” in chapter 5 and Matthew’s “Separation of the Sheep and Goats” in chapter 25 help us see beyond the blind beggar and into the heart of God.

Recall that one day, Jesus sat down on a hillside and began describing the world as God sees it. The crowd gathered around him: fishermen, laborers, mothers holding children, and people who had walked a long way carrying questions they could barely name. A multitude was present to see Jesus and hear his words about the Kingdom of God.

And Jesus began speaking words that sounded almost like an upside-down version of how the world works. He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the meek... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... Blessed are the merciful... and Blessed are the peacemakers.”

We know this speech is from the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. We read them often and draw hope from them, especially during this Lenten Season. But imagine hearing them for the first time. Because those whom Jesus mentioned as blessed were not the people the world usually calls blessed. Rather, they thought they were often cursed.

Then and now, the world calls the powerful blessed. We look for leaders who are confident, and we see them as blessed. We want our leaders to keep everything under control so that we will be blessed. Notice, Jesus pointed somewhere else entirely.

In his Be Attitudes, he points us toward people who know they need mercy, toward people who refuse cruelty, and particularly toward people who hunger for justice. And not just any kind of justice, but God’s justice of shalom.

While the Beatitudes are a masterpiece of writing, they are not just beautiful poetry. They are lenses. They are intended to teach us how to see the kingdom of God. Because the kingdom appears in places the world does not think to look.

Now hold that thought while we walk down another dusty road. In today's text in the Gospel of John, Jesus encounters a man who cannot see at all. He is a man born blind.

The disciples notice him and ask the kind of question people often ask when something does not make sense. They simply ask, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" This question is not a bad one or meant to be cruel. The disciples are trying to tidy up the world.

But notice Jesus refuses the explanation. He says, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned."

Now notice Jesus' actions. Jesus kneels. He scoops dust from the road. Mixes it with saliva and makes mud. And places it gently on the man's eyes.

Jesus has one more final word. He says, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam."

The man goes. He washes. And suddenly light rushes into a life that had only known darkness. For the first time, he sees the sky, faces, movement, and color. The whole world pours in.

But here is the strange thing about the story. The blind man begins to see. And the more sight he has, the more the people around him begin to look strangely blind.

The neighbors argue about whether he is even the same person. "It's him." "No, it only looks like him." "It can't be."

Eventually, they bring him to the religious authorities, the Pharisees. And instead of celebrating the miracle, they investigate it because the healing happened on the Sabbath. The timing is problematic, and the blind man who is now seeing and Jesus are in trouble. The longer the conversation goes, the clearer the irony becomes.

The man who had been blind begins to see who Jesus is. First, he calls Jesus a man, then a prophet, and finally he says, "Lord, I believe."

Meanwhile, the people most confident in their spiritual vision cannot see what is standing right in front of them. Which leads Jesus to say something startling. Jesus ends our text by saying, "I came into this world so that the blind may see, and those who see may become blind."

Our last story is another in the Gospel of Matthew: the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. At the end of time, the nations gather before the Son of Man. And the king says: "I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me."

And the righteous ask a revealing question: "Lord... when did we see you?" There is that word again. We are supposed to "see." The sheep had learned to see Christ where others did not. The sheep sees Jesus among the hungry, among the sick, among strangers (or Xenos, which means foreigner), and among the least.

Which brings us back to that road in John's gospel. Because if you look carefully at the story, the miracle does not begin with Jesus making mud. The miracle did not begin at the Pool of Siloam. Where did the miracle start? The real miracle begins earlier, much earlier. The real miracle begins with something so small we almost miss it.

The miracle began when Jesus saw him. Before the mud, the washing, and the sight, Jesus saw the man that everyone else had learned to look past.

A beggar beside the road. One more invisible life in a busy world. One life so unimportant to their transactional world that people had walked past him for years. But Jesus stopped, and he saw him. Which may be the truest miracle in the whole story.

Before the blind man ever saw Jesus, **Jesus saw him**. And that miracle changes how we hear everything else. Because the gospel is not first about our ability to see God. The gospel begins with God seeing us. With God seeing the people others overlook. With God seeing the lives the world has pushed to the side. With God seeing the ones who feel invisible.

Which means the real and honest question for us as a church may not begin with our vision at all. The real question is not about a properly written Mission and Purpose statement or a well-prepared and submitted Mission Study to the Session and presbytery of Middle Tennessee.

The honest question we all share begins with Jesus' vision. Where is Christ already stopping in our community? Where is Christ already noticing someone the rest of the world has learned to pass by?

We are a Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation in Franklin, and we are a beautiful community. We are a thriving place. But even here, perhaps some people feel unseen. Perhaps some are here whose struggles are hidden. Perhaps some are here who the world quietly walks past. And if the gospel is true, Christ is already standing there, seeing them, and calling them by name.

And perhaps... maybe... the calling of the church is not simply to open our eyes. Perhaps our calling is to learn to see as Jesus sees. Perhaps we are to open our eyes and notice the people others overlook. Maybe we are to stop when the world keeps walking, and in our stopping, we are to recognize Christ standing quietly among the least.

Because the miracle of the blind man receiving sight did not begin with mud.

The blind man's sight began the moment Jesus stopped and saw someone everyone else had forgotten. And if we are honest, that may still be the miracle the world needs most.

Maybe the world does not need more certainty in political positions. Perhaps we are not here to provide more theologically correct arguments. But people who have learned from Jesus how to see, to really see. To see the person beside the road. To see the stranger. To see the neighbor who feels invisible.

And when we begin to see that way, when we begin to see the way Jesus sees, then something astonishing begins to happen. The blind receive sight. And the kingdom of God, the one MLK could see on the mountaintop and the one that Jesus saw, comes a little closer to the world. Amen.