

I.N.I.

EYES THAT SEE: WHAT A GIFT

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA

✠ Fourth Sunday in Lent-A, 3. April, A.D. 2011 ✠

John 9:1-41 As he 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."

13They 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."

18The 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; 21but 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. He will speak for himself." 22His 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. 23Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24So 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." 25He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27He 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?" 28Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

35Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." 37Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." 38He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. 39Jesus 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." 40Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" 41Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. [Gal. 1:3-5]

Eyes that see, what a gift! You know, of course, that we don't see just with our eyes, we see mostly with our brain.

Our eyes each have an optic nerve running out the back which connects to our brain.

So when light enters our eyes, an image is sent to the brain and there it is interpreted.

Neuro-biology explains it this way:

"Each dorsal lateral geniculate nucleus then projects to the ipsilateral ... visual cortex; as a matter of fact, the lateral geniculate nuclei provide the only subcortical input to the primary visual cortex of primates." (Physiology of Behavior, Carlson. 1986, p.181)

OK, that's clear, right? Shall I read it again? There'll be a quiz later.

So when we talk about eyes, and seeing, and light needed to see, and blindness -- we have opened up a large subject.

We have to have light to see by -- but when a blind person says, for example, "Oh, now I see," it usually means that she perceives something, or recognizes a truth, but not that her blindness has been cured.

So now as we look into this marvelous story of the man born blind who was cured by our Lord, we have to consider several meanings of blindness and seeing..

Point 1 points to the first problem: Who Is really the Blind One

We are walking with our Lord Jesus toward Jerusalem. **1As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.**

The first rule of the would-be helper is that you must be able to see. But we see what we want to see. And ---- our eyes play tricks on us. E.g., we are familiar with optical illusions. Here's a famous one -- the mid-lines are exactly the same length. Do you believe it?

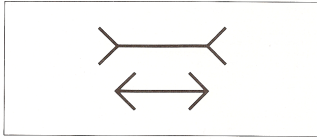


Figure 2.5.
The Müller-Lyer illusion.

Jesus saw a blind man.

The disciples saw a sinner, **2His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"**

The Pharisees saw in Jesus a troublemaker: **16Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath."**

The blind man's parents saw a grown-up who no longer belonged to them:

20His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but 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. He will speak for himself."

All (except Jesus) fell short of seeing a miracle: a blind man who can now see! Just who are the blind ones in this story, anyhow? It's not that that easy to tell.

Our blindness about our own sins is also not that easy to see.

Point 2 points to a worse problem: In our hearts we want to defend our selves.

We see what we want to see, not only with our eyes, but also with our hearts.

The disciples saw punishment -- somebody must have sinned that a baby was born blind.

The neighbors saw trouble in the healing. **13They 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.**

Well, naturally! If the sabbath was violated, of course you go to the religious police when that happens.

His parents saw a threat to their own well-being -- they were worried. So instead of defending their son, they let him fend for himself.

The Pharisees, the religious police, were afraid.

In their hearts they saw their power being taken away by this newcomer, Jesus. **16Some of the Pharisees said, "This man [Jesus] is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath."**

So their true colors come out in this story. They were protecting their turf -- kinda like those union teachers in Wisconsin -- so they blamed the man born blind, **"You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" (v.34)**

Sound familiar? Everybody is passing the buck, -- do we recognize ourselves here at all? In our hearts don't we constantly defend our own actions and try to push the blame for our errors onto someone else?

We trust implicitly our own pet version of the truth, and we say, perhaps under our breath, "My mind is made up -- don't confuse me with the facts."

Who was it that sang, "There is none so blind as he who will not see."

Point 3, Our worst problem is about God's judgement.

39 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."

He said this to the formerly blind man.

Some of the Pharisees were eavesdropping while Jesus said this to the man they had ridiculed.

Now they interrupt to say, "Did we hear that right, you're calling us blind?"

What was the sin of the Pharisees?

They were one sect of the religious establishment -- what was wrong with their belief system that they should be judged?

Matthew's Gospel shows a number of things wrong with them, but here in John's story, the glory of God manifests itself in healing this lowly blind man, and they can't see it!

They knew Isaiah's prophecy that Messiah would open the eyes of the blind, but they could not see that Jesus was the promised Messiah because of their own blindness.

They lived by the Law of Moses. So when they called in the man born blind, and talked with him the second time --

26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" **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?" **28** Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. **29** We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

They could not, they would not, see the glory of God in this miracle, because in their hearts they were fixated on the Law as the only religious truth.

And by that Law the religious professionals are judged.

Are we, as Lutheran religious professionals, not seeing what we ought to see?

We need to ask ourselves again and again about our own faith stance lest we be judged.

The philosopher Nietzsche once wrote in Also Sprach Zarathustra, "Zarathustra spoke, as usual, magnificently beside the point."

When our Lord God opens the book of our life at the last, will He write in the margin of our book, "You missed the point?!"

Point 4: Good news: a solution has been seen in the face of the Judge

Our Lord Jesus predicted a solution -- John, the Apostle, reports in 3:14 that Jesus spoke, near the beginning of his ministry, of "being lifted up."

That prediction came true.

In the last chapters of John we see the glorious Son of God "lifted up" on the cross.

What?! The Son of God on a Roman cross?

Yes. There, the Judge, Jesus Christ, is judged! -- for us!

The verdict -- death by crucifixion!

The good news of John's Gospel -- you know that the word "Gospel" means "Good news," right? -- the climax of John's Gospel is that the Holy Critic of everything pharasaical is himself judged, sentenced, and executed there on the cross.

The hammer of justice falls on, not the Pharisees, nor any other sinners, but upon Messiah, the anointed Son of God.

This is not a tragedy, it is God's glory!

The good news is not just that He sent a miracle worker, but that God gives to us, because of Jesus, what he demands of us, our very own cloak of righteousness when we stand accused before the Judge.

Now, wonder of wonders, Jesus has the last word from the empty tomb: he rises up from the dead after being lifted up on that cross, to give us life everlasting

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16, 17).

All right, let's review:

Point 1 -- Problem: Who Is really Blind? (We see what we want to see)

Point 2 -- Worse problem: In our hearts we always defend our selves.

Point 3 -- Our worst problem is God's judgement.

Point 4 -- Good news: a solution is seen in the face of the Judge

Last point: The now-healed blind man believes in and worships Jesus

You remember that the no longer blind man was excommunicated. Yes, the Pharisees "drove him out" of the Synagogue.

35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." 38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

Now the man born blind not only had eyesight, but he also had insight.

He now had eyes to see -- what a gift -- but he also had a heart to believe.

His automatic response was to worship his new Lord and Master.

Let our prayer this Lent be, "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord Jesus, that I may really see."

As we chant in the opening canticle of Matins, "O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker."

From our own blindness to "Eyes that see: what a gift!"

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

S.D.g.

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