

John 9:1-7

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?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 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, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

John 9:8-41

The 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?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He 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." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then 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." Some 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. So 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."

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 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 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. He will speak for himself." 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. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

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." He answered, "I do now know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 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?" Then they reviled him, saying, "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.” The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and 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.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

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

Sermon

Close your eyes... keep them closed for now.

Imagine that it has always been this way, that you have never seen light, never seen the face of your neighbors or family or your pastor. Imagine that you have had to rely on the kindness of strangers, that because you are blind, there is no place for you in civilized society. And so, in the darkness, you have learned to beg on the street, and to hope for more kindness than disdain, more love than meanness. But you know disdain and meanness.

Imagine the times where someone has tried to sneak up on you, you could hear them but you didn't know what their intentions were. They would try to sneak up and then kick your legs and then run, laughing and telling their friends about what they had done. Imagine the hours spent on the road, ignored by all the people passing by, they don't even notice the dust they kick up that causes you to cough. You are just another fixture of the city, the blind guy who always stands on the corner.

Imagine one day you hear people talking, it seems that they might be talking about you, but they are just far enough away, and the other noise is just enough to not quite hear what they are saying. You hear the sound of someone about to spit and you instinctively lean back and put your hands up to shield your face. You have heard that sound too many times before, and you know what is about to happen.

But you do not feel the expected moisture, instead, you feel the gentle touch of rough hands upon your face. At first you think to pull away, but the hands are both gentle and firm. You feel something soft and wet touch your eyes, a clay, a putty, a mud being rubbed against them. And then a loving voice speaks to you, "Go to Siloam and wash." You don't know what else to do, you don't understand - except that you know have mud on your face and people will not be kind to a blind man with a dirty face, so you make your way to the pool.

You kneel down, place your hands into the water and draw up the water to your face. As the waters wash away the mud, something changes, light enters your retina and reflects off of the cones in the back of the eye, sending, for the first time, a signal to the brain, an image. Open your eyes.

Can you imagine what this man's encounter with Jesus would have felt like. How happy he would have been. This was a man who, because of his disability, that he has had since his birth, he has not been a normal part of society. But now, with this new sight, there is no reason that he cannot live a normal life.

Can you imagine the surprise that he has when he goes back home, only to find that the neighbors and friends seem to not recognize him, "Is this the same man, no, but he kind of looks like him." It seems that they identified him with his blindness, and they missed his humanity. Imagine the surprise when he is taken to the religious leaders, the

Pharisees, and instead of joy at the story that he tells, he only finds questions and anger and a people trying to discount what has happened, to explain it away. Imagine the surprise when your parents come in, and they acknowledge you as their son, but won't stand with you in your amazing story. Imagine, expecting that it was your blindness that had kept you marginalized and left begging on the side of the road, but discovering it was not your blindness, but the blindness of others that still marginalizes you.

And then imagine seeing, for the first time, the one whose voice you recognize. You know it is Jesus, and in him you see and hear the Son of Man. Here you find one who not only opened your eyes, but one who sees you for who you truly are, a beloved child of God. This is one you can believe in, one you can follow, one that you have both heard and seen, one who hears you and knows who you are. Thanks be to Jesus, for his love that opens our eyes, and welcomes us in. Amen