

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent: March 19, 2023 jj

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The Holy Spirit inspired John to write down some of the one-on-one conversations that Jesus had with people. These are part of what makes the Gospel of John unique, a little different from the first three, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Just think of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, today the man who was born blind, the conversation with Martha, the sister of Lazarus in John 11, and so on. And often the people talking to our Lord suffer from some misperception: remember Nicodemus doesn't understand what it means to be "born again," the Samaritan woman doesn't quite grasp Jesus' idea of "living water." They're thinking only about earthly things, but Jesus lifts them up to something more, something about Himself and the heavenly blessings He comes to bring.

Today in the story of the man born blind, the one talking to Jesus begins to understand who He is, but as for the religious leaders who are already against Jesus, they turn against the man He healed too. Who is it who really "sees" now? What kind of "sight" is Jesus talking about? And just like last week with the Samaritan woman, so this week with the man born blind—the one who meets and talks with Jesus is led to give public testimony to his meeting with Christ, true God and true man.

Today Jesus does two things for the man born blind: He opens his eyes physically, and He opens his eyes spiritually. And not only that: Jesus opens the man's mouth, too. But the good news is, He will do all those things for you also.

First, Jesus opens the man's eyes physically. That is really something, isn't it? Maybe we gloss right over that, because we've heard so many stories of Jesus' miracles. But it really is something quite remarkable. Jesus gives sight to a blind man! This just doesn't happen! And not only was the guy blind, it's significant that he

was *born* blind! His sight couldn't be recovered, because he never had it. There wasn't the possibility that the guy was pulling a scam, conspiring with some religious teacher who claims to be a "miracle-worker." No, this man had been born blind; they even asked his parents to make sure. Jesus and His works were for real, after all. There could be no question it was a miracle, as the investigation soon showed, much to the anger of His opponents.

The Lord gave sight to a man blind from birth. It's a remarkable, miraculous healing—a repeat of creation, really—putting it back to the way it was in the very beginning and the way it will be again after the end of the world. This healing is a sign of the ultimate healing Jesus came to bring: a new creation, humanity will be fully restored. And the restoration comes ahead of time, a preview of what's coming, because Jesus came to bring the kingdom of heaven down here to earth. He came to bring life and wholeness to fallen man and the fallen creation. He would do it through His saving mission, which would lead Him to the cross, for the sin of the world. And He would show forth the results that are coming because of His mission, even now in a few select cases—like this giving sight to the blind—to give us encouragement and hope while we wait for the full salvation that is not yet here on a general basis. It's like saying: "Here's what is coming; in fact, I'll let you witness a little bit of it now."

When you read the Gospel of John, you should note that these miracles are called "signs," pointing to who Jesus is and what He came to do and what He will do in the future. Do you realize this? This is the sort of thing that is in store for all of us! Someday I'm not going to need these glasses; my sight will be perfectly restored. Whether you'll use a cane or walker, over the counter meds or prescription, the time

is coming when they'll be useless, too. You'll be running free and healthy beyond what you could ever do. Someday those with mental disorders will be thinking clearly and be rid of all their anxiety. Someday, on the great Last Day, the grave itself will be opened and the saints will receive glorified bodies, better than new. For Jesus makes all things new, exactly how it will be we're not told yet. But we're assured that He will raise up these mortal bodies and give us true life, eternal life. You already have it, in fact, that eternal life; you just don't see it yet with your two eyes.

So Jesus opens the eyes of the man born blind, opens his eyes physically. Jesus puts some mud on the man's eyes and tells him to wash. He specifies a certain place to wash, the Pool of Siloam. When Jesus attaches his mighty word to ordinary water, great things happen, just like it does when we're talking about Baptism. But here, the man goes and washes, and comes home seeing. Yet there's more sight still to come. Jesus will open the man's eyes spiritually as well. That's the second thing Jesus does for the man. And He will do it, while at the same time, He opens the man's mouth. As the man is placed into situations where he has to talk about what happened to him, you can tell that he's beginning to reflect on his experience and who the Man might be who gave him sight. This will lead to a second encounter with Christ, at which time Jesus bestows on him the gift of faith, which John the Evangelist was inspired to describe as spiritual sight.

So the man is healed, and naturally people are curious. How can this be? Is this even the same guy we knew before? This isn't a scam, is it? No, it's the same guy. We know him. OK, now, what happened? Who healed you? So the man tells them. There you have the third thing: the Lord opened this man's lips so that his mouth could declare His praise. His statement was simple: "He told me to wash, so I went and washed, and then I could see." Pretty straightforward. No need to spice it up. The

greatness of the miracle speaks for itself. The man simply gave witness to what Jesus did for him.

Of course this brought rage and spite to the hypocritical Pharisees, because all they could hear was blasphemy, and on the Sabbath of all days. They question the healed man, "What do you have to say about this man?" You know, the Pharisees can't even bring themselves to say Jesus' name. So the man surmises, "He is a prophet." Well, at least he's on the right track. He knows that Jesus must have power from God. Only soon the man will discover that Jesus is even more than a prophet.

But the Pharisees, they cannot get around the fact that Jesus really accomplished this great miracle. They can't stand it that people will conclude that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Christ. That's too much for them. Grasping at straws, they question the young man again, trying to find something to use against Jesus. But the man whom Jesus healed is not intimidated. He knows what happened to him, and he's sticking with it: "I don't know that much about this Jesus. What I do know is that He healed me, there's no question about that. Now you guys, the religious experts, (he says) you ought to be figuring something out here. Only God can heal blind people. And God wouldn't be doing this through Jesus unless God was with Him."

As the man is testifying to the Pharisees, at the same time the light must be beginning to dawn for him. Jesus opened his eyes physically, He opened his mouth to confess the truth, and now Jesus is opening the man's eyes spiritually. There's persecution too: the young man gets thrown out, back on the street where he was, even his parents won't stick up for him. Jesus hears about this and goes looking for the man. He has something more to give him. "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Jesus asks him, using His messianic title. "Who is he?" the man replies. "Tell me so I can believe in him." You

see, the field of the man's heart had been plowed, the seed had been planted, and now it is ready to sprout. "You have now seen Him; in fact, He is the one speaking with you." "Lord, I believe." And just as before, Jesus speaks, and great things happen. Faith has been created in the man's heart. His eyes have been opened now in an even greater sense: He can see by faith who Jesus is. He has begun to see what Jesus has come to do. That He's on a mission from the Father to bring new life, to restore creation, to make right what had gone terribly wrong with humanity and this created order. Jesus came to fix all that. Jesus came so that you who were born spiritually blind would see, really see.

This mission continues in churches as well as in our schools that stay true to His Word that is for all ages. They do not let the psychologizing, politically correct, market-research-driven world dilute that life-giving Word. It is the one truth that humanity has, one Way that creation will be restored and poor sinners won back to God. Jesus speaks His Word from the pulpit, in the classroom and in the Christian home, and great things happen when the Word is heard. His is the creating Word of eternal life that brings true, spiritual sight to those who are blind and dead in sin, meaning you and me. Only Jesus, only He removes the sin and brings His light into our midst, all in His own time, all at His rate of success, whatever that may be, instead of ours.

And He does it in a way that seems most peculiar to us--by taking the sin upon Himself. What's that? All the hatred and hostility of men who shake their fist at God--those who think they can see but really they're blind--Jesus takes all this rage against God and lets it hit Him. Jesus takes our clouded sight and misperceptions about God--the blindness of men's souls groping around in this dark world, lost and confused--Jesus opens our eyes and brings us home to God. He does it by standing as the lightning rod for God's deserved wrath against us rebels. Jesus lets the bolt of Divine

Judgment hit Him in our place, on the cross. All that has been taken care of, and the result is life. And light. And sight. Spiritual sight now--we see Jesus for who He is, we see ourselves back right with God. Physical sight, as that's restored for all of us along with everything else wrong with this fallen creation--that's coming, too. It's on the way, Jesus guarantees it. Look up in faith to the cross and have real hope today. For Jesus opens your eyes, and He opens your lips, too, that your mouth may sing his praises, to confess your faith and joyfully tell others what He has done.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.