

He Came Home Seeing
John 9:1-25 & 35-41
August 14, 2022

Today's lesson is about a man who was sightless. Although we are not given the man's name, he must have been well-known because the disciples knew that he had been born blind. What really mattered to the blind man was not what had happened in the past but that Jesus saw him on this particular day. We can be certain "that other people passed this man every day and never saw him. They never tried to help him or even to relate to him. They acted like he wasn't even there. Isn't that the way it is when someone has a handicapped condition of any sort or is different from us in any way? Don't we tend to shy away? (Or hurry past) not out of any kind of ill feelings but simply because we do not know how to react." (1) I am most uncomfortable being around someone who is blind. I just never know what to say or how to act. Mostly I just try to make sure that they are safe. I have never had a close friend who was blind. That could be at the root of my feeling ill at ease. When we find ourselves in uncomfortable situations as we all have at times, it is helpful to remember that we are all simply human beings and that we need to look beyond our differences and see each other as children of God.

I was planning on learning to play the harmonica from a blind gentleman at the Elk Rapids Presbyterian Church named Art Wilkes who passed away about a year ago. Perhaps some of you knew him. I told him just before I began pastoring here that I thought I would not have time and in so doing let an opportunity to learn and develop a friendship slip by. It just happens that way sometimes.

Jesus viewed this man differently than his disciples. Jesus wanted to make this man's life better. His disciples were more interested in finding out what caused his blindness. They asked Jesus why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sin or that of his parents? These seem like strange questions to us but those of Jesus' day knew little about the causes of blindness. Their explanation for any form of suffering was that someone must have sinned. "Who sinned," the disciples asked Jesus, "that this man was born blind?" (John 9:2) We may question their thinking. "How could the blindness possibly be due to his sin, when he had been blind from birth?" (2) Jewish theologians had two answers: 1. They believed in prenatal sin--that one could begin to sin in the womb. 2. That there was a pre-existence of the soul waiting to enter the body and that they were already good or bad. The writer of the Book of Wisdom says: "Now I was a child good by nature, and a good soul fell to my lot." (Wisdom 8:19)

We are more receptive of the idea that the sin of the parents can be passed on to the offspring. We know that the behavior of a parent can have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for a child.

Jesus answered his disciples by assuring them that no one sinned. He says, "He was born blind so that God 's work might be revealed in him." (John 9:3)

Then Jesus "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 home able to see." (John 9:6b-7) This is one of the three times that Jesus spit to affect a cure. "The use of spit seems strange, repulsive, and unhygienic; but in the ancient world it was quite common. Spittle, and especially the spittle of some distinguished person, was believed to possess certain curative qualities." (3) Today we don't use spittle as a medical treatment, but Jesus used the methods and customs of his time. He used acceptable medical techniques in order to gain a patient's confidence and to effect healing.

After anointing the blind man's eyes with mud Jesus sent him to the pool of Siloam to wash. This pool has been around for about 3,000 years. It has played an important role in Jerusalem's history. There is a tunnel which is 1,750 feet long and cut through solid rock which connects the pool to the Spring of Gihon outside the city wall. It was constructed during the reign of King Hezekiah 700 years before Jesus, to provide a water source for Jerusalem if she was besieged. The tunnel is large enough to walk through. The pool which is quite large, was called Siloam, which means sent because the water has been sent through the tunnel into the city. Jesus told the man to go and wash in the pool and he came home able to see.

"James I. Kraft, a renowned Christian layman, recalls a great turning point in his development the day that a certain kindly eye doctor came into his life. James was a fourteen-year-old boy, one of eleven children living on a farm in Canada. In his book, Adventure in Jade, he relates that he had never been able to distinguish objects clearly. His nearsightedness was so acute and so distressing that he assumed everyone on earth suffered continuously from furious headaches, and that all the earth had a blurry image of a boat seen from underwater. But one summer an eye doctor from the city was vacationing in the vicinity, and young James was taking care of the doctor's horse and buggy. Noting James' extreme nearsightedness, the doctor insisted that he go to the city with him to be fitted with a pair of glasses. In that gift of glasses, James Kraft gratefully recalls, that the doctor 'gave me the earth and all that was in it, completely in focus and beautiful beyond anything I could have dreamed...I cannot think of another act of human kindness,' Kraft concludes, 'in my lifetime which can compare with his.'" (4)

"The blind man that Jesus healed would undoubtedly have given the same kind of testimony. In fact, when his neighbors asked how it is that he now can see he replied: 'The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So, I went and washed, and now I can see.' (John 9:11) Here the blind man begins to understand who Jesus is and he calls him 'the man.' He began to think of Jesus as a wonderful man who did for him what no one else had ever done." (5)

It seems that others should have been filled with joy that this man could now see, but that was not the case. Some of his neighbors were not sure that he was ... "the same man who used to sit and beg," and when he insisted that he was the one, they demanded to know how his eyes were opened. He told them what Jesus had done for him. They brought him to the Pharisees, the conservative religious leaders of Jesus' day. They wanted to know how he could see and he told them. That is when the trouble started, because this healing took place on the Sabbath. Jesus had violated the Sabbath law in three ways 1. by making clay he was guilty of working--a Sabbath violation, 2. it was forbidden to heal on the Sabbath and 3. "As to applying spittle, it was not lawful to put it so much as upon the eyelids." (6) Jesus was always much more interested in showing love and mercy than in keeping the law.

Reading verse 16; "Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God for he does not keep the Sabbath.'"

"But others asked, 'How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?' So, they were divided."

Turning to the blind man they asked him what he had to say. He takes another step forward in his understanding of who Jesus is. When challenged by the Pharisees he calls Jesus "a prophet," (John 9:17) Or a person "who lives close to God" and "brings God's message" to others. (7) Most certainly Jesus qualifies.

They asked his parents if he had been born blind. They said yes, but how he was able to now see they did not know. They said to ask him--"he is of age." (John 9:21) They said this knowing that anyone who acknowledged Christ as the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. The Pharisees calling Jesus a sinner asked the blind man again. He said, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I do not know. The one thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25) They got into a heated discussion about Jesus and the Pharisees threw him out of the synagogue.

When Jesus heard what happened he found the man who had been blind and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Verses 36 through 38 read: "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking to you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. The man's understanding of Jesus continued to deepen. First, Jesus is "a man," next, "a prophet" and finally, "Lord." One of the great joys of traveling our Christian journey is growing in our knowledge of Jesus.

Jesus says in verses 39 through 41, "For judgement I have come into the world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind. Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?"

"Jesus said, 'if you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim that you see, your guilt remains.'"

The Pharisees can't believe that anyone would consider them spiritually blind. "The Pharisees' claim to sight shows their complete unawareness of their spiritual blindness and need. And, though they claim to have sight, their actions are evidence of their blindness." (8) Only the one who realizes his weakness can become strong...his own blindness can learn to see...his own sin can be forgiven. The Pharisees who by strictly following the law missed out on the bounty and blessings Jesus offered them.

We too can miss out on these blessings. Jesus wants to heal us. Do we have healthy eyes or are we spiritually blind?

"During the Christmas season of 1879, a newspaper reporter in Boston saw three little girls standing in front of a store window full of toys. One of them was blind. Coming closer, he heard the other two girls trying to describe the playthings to their sightless friend. He said that he had never thought how difficult it would be to explain what something looks like to someone who has never been able to see. The incident became the basis for a newspaper story.

Two weeks later this same reporter attended a meeting conducted by Dwight L. Moody. His purpose was to catch the great evangelists in some inconsistency and expose him. He was greatly surprised, therefore, when Moody used the reporter's own newspaper account of the three children to illustrate a spiritual truth. 'Just as the blind girl couldn't visualize the toys,' said Moody, 'So an unsaved person can't see Christ in all his glory.' Moody went on to say that God opens the eyes of anyone who acknowledges his sin and accepts the savior in humble faith. The newspaper man was touched by Moody's words and saw that he too was blind and in need of Christ's healing touch." (9)

Jesus helps us see our families, our friends, and new ways of living in and through God. Jesus saw the blind man and healed him. If we let him, he can and will open our spiritual eyes and empower us to live with joy knowing that we will see him in all his glory at journey's end.

Amen.

- (1) Dynamic Preaching March 1996 p. 15-16
- (2) John vol 2 William Barclay p. 37
- (3) Ibid. p. 41
- (4) Dynamic Preaching March 1996 p. 16-17
- (5) John vol 2 William Barclay p. 51
- (6) Ibid. p. 44-45
- (7) Ibid. p. 51
- (8) NIV Study Bible p. 2091
- (9) Dynamic Preaching March 1996 p. 18-19