

I Was Blind, But Now I See

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Gospel reading. **Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”** Here ends our text.

A man and a woman were sitting on a bench waiting for the bus to the airport. It was winter, and so to take their minds off the cold, they struck up a conversation. They discovered, coincidentally, that they were each taking a flight to Bermuda. “It’s such a paradise there,” the man said. “I love the colors. The sky is a brighter shade of green, the grass is a darker purple, and the sun is a deeper shade of blue there.” The woman thought this odd and began to tell the man that the sky is blue, the grass is green, and the sun is yellow everywhere. But the man argued that they weren’t. Then the woman noticed that the man held a white walking cane and wore dark glasses. He was blind and couldn’t know anything about colors unless his eyes were opened. The bus to the airport pulled up, and the woman asked the man if she could help him on to the bus. But the man shook his head and said, “That’s not the bus to airport.” “Oh, yes it is,” she replied. “It says ‘Airport’ on the marquee on top of the bus.” But though the man couldn’t see, he shook his cane and insisted it wasn’t. He’d wait for the right bus. The woman didn’t argue anymore, but got on the bus and took her flight to paradise. But later the blind man heard the sound of an approaching diesel engine and tried to board a moving snowplow and was killed. Then he was not only blind but also dead.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” They were looking for some actual sin that this man or his parents committed that resulted in this consequence. But Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned.” Now Jesus wasn’t saying that this man or his parents had never sinned. Rather he was saying that there wasn’t one particular actual sin in thought, word, or deed that they had committed to cause this blindness. Rather this man was born blind because there was sin in the world. Ever since Adam’s original sin, we live in a fallen creation. Not only did that original sin bring death to all men, but it also brought thorns and thistles, disease and famine, suffering and even birth defects. So when we see a person who suffers from a calamity, an illness, an accident, or even an earthquake or tsunami, and we ask, “Why did this happen?”, we shouldn’t assume that God is judging them for some particular sin. Rather God is judging the world for that original sin of Adam. But Jesus said, “No, it wasn’t that this man or his parents sinned that he was born blind. Rather that the work of God might be displayed in him.” Even though the original sin caused this blindness, even though God allowed it to happen, God was going to use this tragedy to display his work in this man. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” God the Father sent Jesus so that this man might see by that light, but in more ways than one.

So Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud. He said to the man, “Go and wash in the pool of Siloam,” which means “Sent.” So the blind man went and washed and came back seeing.

Now this caused not a small stir among the neighborhood. The neighbors argued, “Isn’t this the blind man who used to sit and beg.” Some said, “Yes.” Others said, “No.” But the man insisted that the MAN Jesus had anointed his eyes with mud and sent him to wash. Then he received his sight.

So the neighbors brought the man to the Pharisees, and he tells them the same story. But the Pharisees argue among themselves. Jesus had healed this man on the Sabbath. Some said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” So they asked the man, “What do you say about him?” This time a little light bulb went off in the man’s head, and he said, “He is a PROPHET.”

The Jews can’t believe this, and so they must disprove the miracle. They call in the man’s parents. “Is this your son, who was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents could readily attest that this was their son and he was born blind. But they were afraid to give any credit to Jesus. You see, the Jews had agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus as the Christ was to be cast out of the synagogue. They were hostile to Jesus. So the man’s parents simply said, “He’s old enough. Ask him.”

So they hauled the man back in and questioned him again. “Tell the truth,” they said. “We know that this man is a sinner.” The man said, “I don’t know about that, but one thing I do know. I was blind, but now I see.” Again they asked him, “How did he open your eyes?” In frustration, the man said, “I told you already, and you didn’t listen. Why do you want me to tell you again? Do you want to become his DISCIPLES, TOO?” Without thinking about it, the man was confessing that he was now a disciple, a follower of Jesus. This is more than the Jews can bear. A fierce argument breaks out. They revile the man and accuse him of being a disciple of Jesus, while they are

Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 22, 2020, John 9:1-41

disciples of Moses. But like a true disciple of Jesus, this man defends him. In sound logic the man reasons that 1) God doesn't listen to unbelieving sinners but only believers and worshippers of him, 2) no one has ever opened the eyes of a man born blind, 3) if this man were not from God, he could do nothing, and finally 4) since Jesus opened his eyes, he must be sent from God. It's a lock tight argument. But the Jews can only snarl at him and say, "You were steeped in sin at birth. How dare you lecture us!" And they cast him out of the synagogue. They were enemies of this man and enemies of Jesus.

But Jesus heard what had happened and went and found this man. He asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" It was his code word for himself and for the Christ. The man answered, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him." You see, this man had never actually seen Jesus yet, at least not with his eyes. Jesus said, "You have seen him, and it is he who is now speaking to you." The man said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped Jesus. The work of God was displayed in him.

Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees overheard this and said, "Are we blind, too?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains."

Do you see what's happening here? Jesus not only gives the blind man physical sight, but he also gives him spiritual sight. After giving the man sight with his eyeballs, he also gives him sight with his heart. All through the story, the man becomes more and more seeing. First, the man sees Jesus as only a MAN. Then he sees Jesus as a PROPHET sent from God. Then he sees himself as a DISCIPLE of Jesus and defends him. Finally he sees Jesus as the CHRIST and worships him as true GOD. But the Pharisees and Jews who claim they can see, who claim to be the religious leaders and knowledgeable of all things spiritual become more and more blind. They see Jesus as a SINNER. They see themselves as only DISCIPLES of Moses and the Law. They see Jesus as their ENEMY. They speak of God and his salvation in Christ like a blind man speaks about colors. They can't really know about any of these things until their eyes are opened. The man tries to help them to paradise on the bus of the Gospel, but instead they become argumentative and hostile to God. They insist on riding the bus of the Law, which only mows them down and kills them. They are blind and also dead.

But the Pharisees were right about one thing regarding the Law. The blind man *was* steeped in sin at birth. He was born in utter sin. But they were too, and so are we. David writes, "I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." We may not be born with a physical birth defect, but we're all born with a spiritual birth defect. We're born spiritually blind. That original sin of Adam is passed on to us like a hereditary disease. At our birth, instead of pronouncing "It's a boy," or "It's a girl," they should have gasped, "It's a sinner," for that's what we are by nature. Our original sin, our sinful nature, which we inherited from Adam through our parents, makes us blind to all the things of God and his salvation. We can't understand them. Paul writes, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them." And like the Pharisees, our sinful nature makes us enemies of God. Paul writes again, "The sinful mind is hostile to God." We shake our walking canes and snarl at God, insisting we know best. "I know the way to paradise. I can get there myself." Of course this hereditary disease of original sin, manifests itself in all kinds of symptoms. It causes us to commit all kinds of actual sins of thought, word, and deed. "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." But these are only the symptoms of the deeper problem. Our original sin is a terminal disease. It makes us by nature objects of God's wrath and kills us. Paul writes, "As for you, you *were* dead in your transgressions and sins."

Yes, you *were* dead, and you *were* quite blind even from birth, but thankfully not anymore. Jesus saw your blindness. And as the Psalmist says, "The Lord gives sight to the blind." Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord . . . has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind . . . to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Now Jesus didn't make mud and put it on your eyes. He didn't send you to wash the dirt off in a pool so your eyes could see. But in holy baptism, he did put his name on you and pour water on your head. He sent his Spirit to wash the dirt of your sins away so your heart could see. You now see Jesus as true MAN and as a true PROPHET sent by God the Father. But you also see him as true GOD, the CHRIST, who died that you might live. You see yourself as his disciple who testifies about him. Your heart sees Jesus, and today you worship him. The work of God is displayed in you. Like the man who was born blind, you can declare, "I was blind, but because of Jesus, now I see." Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.