

Sermon for July 12, 2020 – “See?”

Fifteenth Sunday of OT, Year A – Texts: John 9:1-41

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There I sat on the side of the road just like I'd done everyday begging for money. It was a warm day. I felt the sweat forming on my brow. People were passing by and the smell of the dust kicked up by their sandals reached my nostrils. There was a slight breeze. I heard as the leaves rustled in the wind. I heard birds chirping. I wish I could've told you about the clothes people were wearing or the colors of the fields and sky but I couldn't. Since the day of my birth I'd only known darkness. I'd never seen light. I'd never seen the sun or moon or stars twinkling in the night. I'd never seen my mother or father's faces. I'd never seen trees or animals. I'd been blind from birth. I'd never been able to see and never thought I would. I thought there was no hope for me. That my lot has been cast. There's no cure for blindness.

All the days of my life I sat there. I begged for handouts from strangers so that I might be able to live one more day. But that day turned out to be different. Different in a life changing way. I heard this group of men talking as they were passing by. Normally I didn't listen. I just hoped they'd put something in my basket. But for some reason this felt different. They were talking about me. One of the men said, “Rabbi, who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?” I was floored. This disciple had asked his teacher a question about my family and me as if I weren't even here! How rude! I was blind not dead. I could still hear. I have feelings you know. And then to have the nerve to insinuate that either my parents or I could've caused this to happen. Give me a break. Yeah, I know, the common thought is that if something's wrong in your life then you must've done something to cause it to happen. I was born blind. I hadn't asked for it and neither had my parents. But my parents loved me; they raised me and took care of me. We did nothing to bring this on.

I almost jumped for joy when I heard the Rabbi say “Neither this man nor his parents sinned.” I wanted to shout, “YES! Somebody finally gets it!” But the next words that came out of the Rabbi's mouth puzzled me. He said, “But this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” Wait, what? I have to tell you at that moment I didn't understand what he meant. I thought about that statement for a long time. It took me a while but I think I understand now what he meant. I'll share that a little later. But first let me tell you what happened next. Hang on to your sandals because you are **not** going to believe this.

I heard the Rabbi bend down and scoop up some dirt in his hand. He spit into the dirt and I could hear Him mixing it together. I thought to myself, “What's going on here?” when all of a sudden I felt Him gently putting the mud he just made on my eyelids. Then He gently, but with authority, spoke directly to me and said “Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam.” So I went and did what He said. There was just something in His voice; I believed He truly cared about me. I went to the Pool of Siloam and washed and at that moment my whole life changed.

I received the greatest gift I could've possibly imagined. I could see!!! I'd wanted to see all my life and now I finally could. I saw the water I just washed in and it was so crystal clear. The sky was a bright blue with a few white, fluffy clouds. I saw the trees and fields and I saw people! Oh, to be able to see the expressions on everyone's faces. And at that moment I wanted to see the Rabbi's face but I ran home to see my parents for the first time. As I ran home I shouted to the neighbors and the passersby that I could finally see. Now, I'm not sure how it is in your day with the internet, cell phones, and so forth but back in the day we had this problem called "gossip." You probably don't even know what that is but basically it's talking to people about a problem you have with someone but are too chicken to talk directly to the person about it. Well, I heard some neighbors talking with some people who didn't even know me but had seen me begging on the side of the road. They asked, "Isn't this the same guy who used to sit and beg?" Some acknowledged that it was me but others said that it wasn't me and I just looked like him.

I could not contain my excitement and I told them that yes it was me. They had so many questions. They wanted to know how my eyes were opened. They wanted to know who opened them and where the person who opened my eyes was. I jumped at the opportunity to tell the story. They told me that the man who made me see was named Jesus. I told them every minute detail about what Jesus had done to help me to see. I have to admit I was a bit embarrassed when I had to tell them that I didn't know where Jesus was. To be honest, I didn't even know what He looked like. I hadn't seen His face. Worse, I hadn't even attempted to find Him to say thank you. That's kind of when things got a little complicated.

The Pharisee got involved. You hear things as a beggar and I'd heard that the Pharisees didn't like Jesus and were looking for a way to kill Him. I don't know about you but why would you want to kill someone who can make the blind see and the lame walk? I don't understand. The Pharisees had so many rules! Too many of you ask me! The Pharisees didn't like the idea that Jesus healed me on the Sabbath. That was a violation of one of their top ten rules, the third one I think, the one that says to not do any work on the Sabbath. Evidently, healing a man blind from birth is considered work. I personally consider it a miracle and I'm pretty sure there's no rule against that. But hey, what do I know?

The Pharisees wanted to know how I was healed so I told them what I'd told the others, every single detail. Then the Pharisee started arguing among themselves about who Jesus was. 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?" It got me thinking too, Who is this Jesus? There was definitely something special about Him. After all, I was blind but now I see. How amazing is that? I remember that I referred to Jesus as "the man they call Jesus" when I explained it to the neighbors. But now I realize He can't be just a man. In order to perform miracles He **must** be sent by God. If He was sent by God then He must be a prophet.

All of a sudden the religious leaders turned to me and asked me who I thought He was. They're asking me, a former blind beggar. I'm no rabbi. Yesterday they didn't know or care who I was and avoided me at all cost. Now, these religious leaders, lifelong theologians were asking me. Something told me they didn't really care what I thought but I told them anyway. I said, "He's a prophet." This just made them madder! Now, they were doubting that I'd been blind and had been cured until they sent for my parents. My parents told them, yes I was their child and yes, I'd been born blind. When the Pharisees asked my parents exactly how I gained my eyesight they said, "He's old enough, ask him." My parents were afraid. Everyone knew anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. You see, it was politically incorrect back then to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. I'm sure the days of having to be politically correct are long gone.

Again I was summoned to meet with the Pharisee. I told them the only thing I knew for certain, "I was blind, but now I see!" The meeting seemed to go on and on as it did I started to think more about who Jesus is. If Jesus wasn't from God, He couldn't possibly have been able to do what He did. I took my stand and would not move from it. I made up my mind then and there to follow Him. Then the Pharisees turned to me and asked me again, "What did He do to you? How did he open your eyes?" I'd had enough. So I said to them, "I have told you already and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

Well, that's all they needed to hear. They told me "I was steeped in sin from birth" and threw me out. Blind fools. Why could they not see the truth? I know how that sounds coming from someone born blind but it all seemed so clear to me. I mean, I'm a sinner. I know that. But no more or no less than anyone else and now I'd been thrown out of the Temple and Jesus was gone. What would I do now? It was then that I heard His voice! He'd heard that they'd thrown me out so He came and found me. At first I did not know it was Jesus but I could never forget the sound of His voice. Before I knew it I was standing face-to-face with Him, the man who healed my blind eyes. Amazing isn't it. He sought me out. He came to me. I didn't search for Him. It's as if He knew I had a much greater need than physical healing. He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Suddenly I heard myself answer, "Who is He, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in Him." Jesus said, "You have now seen Him. In fact, He is the one speaking with you." At that moment I looked into my Savior's eyes which were filled with a love and compassion and I said "Lord, I believe!" Then I fell to my knees in worship. I no longer cared about "political correctness." I knew the truth and the truth has set me free. Jesus said to those who were standing there "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.

Why could they not see? Did they just not want to see? What were they afraid of? If I didn't know better I'd say that they're afraid of the truth. Why would they do that?

Well, we avoid the truth because acknowledging the truth quite often means admitting a fault. It means seeing something that might reflect badly on our self-image, something that might require us to change. That's hard. It offends the ego, our sense of self. The ego wants to hold onto fixed beliefs that help us understand the world and our place in it. We don't like having to defend our beliefs let alone change them. After all, we've spent most of our lives forming our particular beliefs, often helped by people we've trusted. From an ego point of view there's little or nothing to be gained. We can even see this as a threat and look to eliminate the threat. It would seem as if the Pharisees see Jesus as a threat. They say "we see" but they don't. But because of their egos they fail to see Jesus for what he truly is. The Pharisees knew the Scriptures, they had an understanding of God but they refuse to accept Jesus.

I bet you know people like this. Their religion gets in the way of faith. We must have clean hearts before God, contrite hearts, humble hearts. We must trust in the Lord with all our heart and not rely on our own sight. Only then will we truly see! See?

Thanks be to God.

Amen and Amen.