

4th Sunday in Lent
March 19, 2023
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
John 9
Sight for the Blind

Dear Friends in Christ,

He had never seen his mother's face. He never gazed at the beauty of a sunset. He had never lifted up his eyes to look at the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. This man had only seen darkness. He was blind from birth. Not many in this world can claim to know what that is like. Some who are blind today find ways to live independent lives and do not let their blindness stop them. But 2,000 years ago, being blind meant a life of dependence on others. So this blind man in John 9 was often seen begging for his daily bread. His greatest need seemed to be for sight. Jesus gives him sight. Then Christ addresses the greatest need of this man, the Pharisees and all of us – the need for spiritual sight.

As Jesus was passing by, 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, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that God's works might be revealed in connection with him. I must do 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."

After saying this, Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and spread the mud on the man's eyes. "Go," Jesus told him, "wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means "Sent"). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.

When Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, he had to move her from thinking about physical water to thinking about spiritual thirst. In John 9, the connection between physical blindness and spiritual needs was already in people's minds. His disciples even thought that this man must have been born blind as a punishment from God for some sin in the family. While blindness and disease and disasters are all a result of sin in general, Jesus makes it clear that this man's blindness is not the result of a specific sin in his life or his parents. Instead, it is an opportunity for Christ to be revealed. So Jesus gives this man his sight.

One might say that this was the easy part. Jesus performs a miracle. Piece of cake...for him. The more difficult part is to change the hearts of those who don't know that they are spiritually blind. Jesus does something amazing to help a man who had suffered blindness for decades. The Pharisees react in typical fashion by accusing Jesus of sin for healing on the Sabbath. They interrogate the man who received his sight and threw him out of the synagogue, excommunicating him for speaking highly of Jesus.

The Pharisees are convinced that they are the only ones who see God's will clearly. They know what the Scriptures say. They know what God desires. They see clearly while all others are blind. Jesus challenges and convicts some of the Pharisees directly in the final verses of chapter 9:

Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, in order that those who do not see will see, and those who do see will become blind." Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and asked, "We are not blind too, are we?" Jesus told them, "If you were blind, you would not hold on to sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

These Pharisees understand that Jesus is calling them blind but they don't want to admit it. When a person is physically blind, they know it. They don't for a moment believe that their eyes are working properly. They know their blindness. But spiritual blindness is different. Those who are spiritually blind claim to be able to see God clearly. They claim to be doing what is right. But these Pharisees were face to face with Jesus and did not see him as the Messiah. They were looking with their physical eyes at the Son of God and refused to believe him. They knew that Jesus had given physical sight to the man born blind and they kept their spiritual eyes tightly closed so they would not see Jesus as the Savior. They claimed to see and therefore their sin remains on them.

We too can be blind to our own blindness. It is much easier for us to point out the blindness and sin of others than to see our own blind spots. Someone has more wealth than we have and in our minds we see how greed has affected that other person. But we fail to see how our hearts covet what they have, how we grumble to God that life isn't fair. We quickly point out the sins of those who hold different political views but are blind to the sins prevalent in our political side of the aisle. It is so easy to see the excuses others make for their sins as just that – excuses. But the excuses we make for our sins are rational and airtight logic. The sinful nature in each of us is still blind and yet refuses to admit it.

Each day we have the great need for spiritual sight.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out. When he found him, he asked, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" "Who is he, sir," the man replied, "that I may believe in him?" Jesus answered, "You have seen him, and he is the very one who is speaking with you." Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" and he knelt down and worshipped him.

The Pharisees threw the formerly blind man out. They were telling him that his sin remained on him, that he had no hope of being right with God. Jesus would not allow this man to stay in spiritual blindness anymore than he allowed him to remain physically blind. So Jesus came to him. Jesus found him. After all, how would a blind person find someone? A spiritually blind person cannot find Jesus either. But Jesus comes to us.

Jesus came to us and through the Holy Spirit, he brought us to faith. He opened our eyes to see and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the One who has taken away our sins. That miraculous gift of spiritual sight was a one time occurrence in the past. But we need Jesus to continually open our spiritual eyes. Otherwise the blindness of the sinful nature will grow as more and more sins hide in our blind spots. We would continue to excuse more and more sin and see the need for Christ less and less, eventually pushing him from our sight completely.

But Jesus will not let us go blind again easily. He finds us as he found the man at the temple. He puts himself before our eyes in his Word. He speaks to us, sometimes with law to shine a light in the blind spots where sin hides, but more often to shine the light on himself. When we have fallen into sin, he comes to us in his Word and promises to forgive us. When the devil tells us that we have no business being in God's family, that God should throw us out of his church, Christ finds us with his gospel promises of grace and forgiveness.

Christ came for people like the man born blind, people who are looking for a Savior but don't know who he is. Jesus came for people like the Pharisees, who refused to believe that Jesus was the Savior or that they needed a Savior from sin. The people we live among today are the same. Some are open to hearing about Christ and interested in learning more. Some are completely against Christ and anything to do

with Christianity. And many just go about their lives, trying to survive, without thinking much about spiritual matters at all. Is there any hope for the unbelievers around us to see Jesus and believe?

If Jesus can give sight to a man born blind, there is hope. If Jesus can give spiritual sight to a person like me and like you who was conceived and born in sin, there is hope. Christ has miraculously given you spiritual sight. He can do the same for those who are still blind to their sin and blind to their one and only Savior.

So we worship the Lord like this formerly blind man. We are not ashamed to be connected with Christ. We are not too proud to humble ourselves before him and beg for his forgiveness. And we let our dependence on Christ be known not only at church, but in our family life, in our work, among our friends. Physical blindness and spiritual blindness are different in this way. The man born blind was dependent on others for many things in life until Jesus gave him sight. But when we receive spiritual sight we realize that we are dependent on Christ for all things, especially forgiveness and eternal life. But we also see that he is completely dependable, trustworthy to deliver on every promise.

Amen.