

But Now I See

Check-in & Introductions

Sermon Reflection Notes

A few weeks ago, on Ash Wednesday, we were reminded where we came from and where we are going; we got a little dirty with ashes from last year's Palm Sunday smeared on our foreheads. We are always a little dirty, a little muddy, a little disheveled. The good news is Jesus loves to play in the dirt and the mud. John, chapter 9, shows us that. This scripture contains the story of the man, blind from birth, whose sight is restored when Jesus makes a bit of a mud pie with some spit and dirt and then smears it on the man's eyes. And if that wasn't enough of a strange thing, the whole incident is prefaced by the disciples asking Jesus, 'Hey...there's a blind guy. Why is he blind? Did he sin? Or was it his parents?'

It's a peculiar question because we know we aren't supposed to ask questions like that, and for the most part we don't. But if we are fully honest, we also know that we do sometimes look at someone else and think: *Well, they must have done something wrong to end up in this situation.* We tend to judge, even when we know we shouldn't. When Jesus was asked about who had sinned, he rejected the premise outright. His answer was neither. We may rush to judgement or even pity. We'll say things like how sad this is, or how challenging that must be. But there is a folly of pity. Those who are blind may have to learn to adapt to a culture designed for those with sight, but they have no problem seeing beauty, no problem thriving, no problem loving. While the world is looking for somebody to blame, God sees an opportunity for renewal and redemption and new life. Life began when God played in the mud. That's the message of Lent: we are just the dirt from the ground, enlivened by divine breath and grace, to be human. The scripture today shows us Jesus bringing healing by getting his hands dirty; if we are going to be Jesus' hands in the world, we've got to get dirty too.

John's gospel doesn't call these instances of healing miracles; he calls them 'signs' which point us to the destination. In this case, the sign shows us a group of people convinced their hands are clean, and that they know how to keep them that way. The sign also points us to Jesus whose dirty hands are actually clean. The blind see and the sighted ones are spiritually blind. Time and again, this formerly blind man is asked what happened, how can you now see? And he answers every time; he tells the story of Jesus and the mud, but no one believes him. The neighbors don't even believe their own eyes that this is the same guy they've known. The Pharisees cannot accept that Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath. For having such good eyesight, the neighbors, the Pharisees, even the man's parents were pretty blind. This miracle sign pointed people to the God who created life and wholeness out of the mud, and the people were afraid to follow where it led. They couldn't imagine this person could be made new. They lacked the courage to be curious. They thought they already had the answers and didn't even try to understand.

It's highly possible the story of a blind man receiving sight, and an incredulous community blind to the work of God in their midst resonates with us. There can be an arrogance among some pious religious folks, those who are sure they see things clearly but are truly blind. Jesus is the light of the world, the light that helps us see everything in a new way—often in a way that runs counter to the expectations of the world around us.

The truth is we all have blind spots. We all have places where we've grown comfortable in the dark. But the Light of the World still kneels in the dirt, still reaches toward us, still says "Go wash, and see." In the season of Lent, as we allow God to work to create in us a clean heart, we are called to be curious rather than certain. To be humble rather than arrogant. To be open to transformation through the creative work of God and mud. If we can manage these things, perhaps we will find that Jesus comes to us too, and we will be able to see Jesus a bit more clearly, and worship Jesus a bit more

rightly. We may be able to sing a little more fully: Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found. Was blind, but now I see.

Scripture

John 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am he." ¹⁰But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to

sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Discussion Questions

1. Read verses 24-34 of the scripture passage. What are the Pharisees focused on? Why?
2. Who is blind in this story and why? OR What does it mean to 'see' according to this scripture lesson?
3. Part of the struggle in this text is the juxtaposition of old, managed truth and new life, new covenant. This juxtaposition often creates 'blind spots' in us. What are blind spots and how do we find them in ourselves?
4. What is the difference between curiosity and certainty? What power does each hold?
5. In Lent, we have decisions to make: to see, or not see, to be unable to see, or to refuse to see or even to be nurtured not to see. How do we move ourselves closer to Jesus and closer to the truth in the statement "I was blind, but now I see"?

Closing Prayer

Holy God, we know that we live in a world filled with people who cynically acknowledge none but themselves, and that we are too often among them. We know that we live in a world where people are trivialized, are mocked as unworthy, and who have little hope except in their prayers to you. And so, we pray this day that you will continue to work your miracles among us. Give us the courage to recognize where the blind ones can see, where the oppressed ones are set free, where the hungry ones are being fed. Bring us to worship, to give thanks, and to bear witness to your amazing work among us. We pray in the name of the One who invited us to different way of life, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

"I once was lost but now am found. Was blind, but now I see."