

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

¹³ They brought to **the Pharisees** the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then 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." ¹⁶ Some 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. ¹⁷ So 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."

¹⁸ **The 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 ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ **His parents** answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹ but 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." ²² His 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. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ So 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." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He 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?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We 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 out **[the man]**, 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. This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Ephesians 5:8-13

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible. This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

"New Eyes"

This morning's story in the gospel of John is packed full of.... well "presumptions", preconceived ideas which confuse and blind people to the truth.¹ I'm not speaking about Jesus' presumptions or presumptions of the man who was born blind. No, not them, but the presumptions of the other groups whom John describes, the groups who respond to Jesus' healing of the man, to Jesus' wondrous restoring of the blind man's sight.

First, there are the disciples. They make the initial presumption that someone who sinned must have caused the man's blindness. "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*", they ask. It is not too surprising of a question, really, because in that day, it was common thought that disabilities, disease, hardship and the like, was divine punishment for sin. In fact, it was part of their theology, their understanding of God. Similar questions are still asked in our day too, despite our imagined advanced perspectives on such things. After earthquakes, hurricanes, cancer diagnoses, airplane crashes, suicides, there are always people who tend to ask: Whose fault is it? It must be someone's fault, or else none of us is safe, right? Yes, the horrible question is still very much around. But Jesus simply says to the disciples, that "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned.*" "*There is no cause-and-effect here,*" (paraphrase) *so stop asking why, and start asking 'Now what?' Pay attention to what God can and is doing*

¹ Jazzy Bostock. "Confusion" (accessed 3-17-2023).

Yes, the disciples, make their initial presumption. But there are also the neighbors, who can't get past their presumption that this man, now with sight, is a different one from the one who used to beg in their midst. He keeps saying, "*I am the man,*" but they think he couldn't be that old beggar, the blind guy that they've stepped over day after day, that they've rushed by paying no heed, that they'd rendered invisible with their notions that he was unworthy of their attention. He's been just a no-account sinner getting his just rewards. In their minds, he was not valued by God, let alone worthy of God's healing touch, if that is what this is. The man tells the neighbors the story, from beginning to end, but they're not satisfied. They are blinded to the truth.

Next, there's the Pharisees. Their poor behaviors that day were based in their preconceived notions, their presumptions that this man Jesus was a threat and one whom they needed to stop. They were blinded by the rumors they'd heard about him. The previously blind man repeats the whole story to them piece by piece, but they, at least most of them, use the Law to indict him. They say that if Jesus made the healing mud from spittle and dirt, then work was done on the Sabbath, and the miracle, if it occurred, would have broken the commandment regarding keeping the day holy.

The Pharisees bring another group into the picture, the man's parents...because "surly they could dismiss this ridiculous claim as false." He's their son, after all. But the parents are blinded by their fears and self-interests, their assumptions that they could be punished if they give a nod toward Jesus as the Messiah. So they withdraw, throwing further conversation about the miracle back to their son. They abandon him, they abandon him because they are afraid, something he is likely very used to.

Finally, the neighborhood tribunal of Jewish officials gets going again, arguing with the man, who simply tells them the truth as he "sees" it. The greatest thing in his life has just happened, and these people are more concerned with marking a demerit against Jesus than recognizing that his blind eyes can now see! He says, "*If this man were not from God, he could*

² Shannon Kershner. "*The Man Born Blind*" <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2017/022617.html>. (accessed 3-17-23).

do nothing!”, whereupon they drive him out.

Now the story goes that Jesus, who “saw” the man, who “saw the man” in the first place, seeks him out again. The doctor seeks out his patient³ to further illuminate his understanding of their previous encounter. Jesus asks him, “*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*” The man says, “*Lord, I believe.*” Then HE falls down and worships him. Jesus showed him that he now could look upon the world with new eyes, physical, yes, but also, spiritual ones.

You know, it’s a remarkable story, and it may be that we are hearing it today because we need to be reminded that we all unfortunately have a bit more of these groups of people in us than we’d like to admit. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we may be choosing not to see some of God’s people, to really see them, thereby keeping them in their isolated places. Maybe we do it out of pity, or charity, or maybe deep down we think that they deserve to be there, but regardless, we make these people invisible to us. In so doing, we remove ourselves from considering where their angers come from or why they feel so forgotten, or afraid.⁴ We do not have to then consider the deep pain they know, that which comes from being stepped over or rushed past. It’s so much easier to just accept the status quo and not rock the boat. Well, brothers and sisters, we need to challenge such preconceived assumptions in ourselves, repent of them, surrender them and allow Jesus to bring us back to the God whom we know came to see everyone, to gather all unto himself, and to not to condemn but to save the world, the whole world.

Yes, the scripture this morning may be serving to remind us of this, but it also may be serving to encourage us. There are likely some of you in this very room who know the sting of others who challenge your faith, who do not understand why you are here this morning and who argue with you as you attempt to explain. “*What do you see in Jesus,?* they say or “*How can you possibly believe?*” They may not be able to hear, they may not be willing to imagine, they may not be open to the power of the Spirit in their midst. They may prefer to sit comfortably in the dark and from there remain cynical and judgmental, from there they may hurl legalisms at

³ Jazzy Bostock.

⁴ Shannon Kirshner.

you and ridicule and accuse you, and from there they may make you feel small and powerless. Well, friends, the Scripture, today, teaches us that we need not fret if we are unable to convince them to the contrary, nor if our responses to them are not theologically deep or academically thorough. Like the man born blind, our answers need simply to be testimonies of our physical and spiritual sight, what our new eyes have witnessed Jesus do in our lives and in the lives of others.

A minister of a large congregation tells the story of one of his parishioners who struggled for years with various forms of addictions. He “lurched from pills to alcohol to hard and soft drugs,” the minister says. Family and friends had attempted to intervene, and various treatment programs were applied and failed. The congregation was very aware of his obsessions as they frequently and uncomfortably interfered with church services and functions. But then one spring night, it all changed for the man. He excitedly told the minister, “Pastor, it was as clear as day. Jesus appeared to me last night, and I met him. I have been liberated of the demons that have stalked me for so long.” Some in the congregation cynically said, “I wonder if he was sober when Jesus came visiting.” Others said, “Isn’t it a shame that Jesus didn’t show up 10 years ago when he had a wife.” The minister, himself, regrets that he did not say anything more than, “Who knows, who are we to doubt?” After years went by and the man remained sober, some who disbelieved then recanted and thought, “Yes, maybe he had had an encounter with Jesus.” But they then asked him, “Why you? Why would Jesus have come to YOU?” And the man replied, “Hey, all I know is that I was a drunk. I was dying and I was unable to help myself. Jesus came. It happened. He rescued me.”⁵

Ah, yes, brothers and sisters, we need be encouraged, not dissuaded by our own presumptions or those of others. Jesus understands...oh, how he understands. He understands the cost. How he understands the pain. And he will seek us out to strengthen and gather us and all others, all others to himself forever. For this he came. For this he died. For this he rose again. We need only confess that we have seen him with our new eyes, that we believe and then....and then, we need only fall down and worship him. To God be the glory. Amen.

⁵Will Willimon. (accessed 3-17-23).