

Lent 4-March 19, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

John 9:1-41

"Receiving Sight" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Every Sunday in March this year we have heard stories where Jesus shines his light on individuals who are walking in darkness and then we learn the different ways Jesus chooses to let his light shine on them. In the first week, we heard how Nicodemus walked through the dark of night to find Jesus hoping that Jesus would shine some light on what it means to be born from above. But when Jesus shined his light on Nicodemus, it was revealed that Nicodemus was not ready to confess that Jesus was anything more than a teacher. In the story of Nicodemus, he returns to his home in the dark of night and as far as we know from this one encounter with Jesus was still also left in spiritual darkness.

Last week, Kendra delivered a message where Jesus finds the unnamed outcast Samaritan woman who was drawing her water not at night, but at noon and the heat of the day so as not to draw anyone's attention to her and so to be reminded of the life she was living that left her in the darkness of shame that she felt each day. In this case, the light of Jesus revealed her sin, but this light turned her to Jesus who became the living water which freed her from her sin. This woman left her bucket and her shame at the well and went to tell others about Jesus who came to give her new life.

Today, Jesus finds another person to shine his light on. As this story begins, we learn that Jesus sees a man who cannot see him. Jesus saw a person unlike everyone else who didn't see the person but saw his problem. A problem of sin. He not only had been living in physical blindness since his birth, but he too was burdened with the shame of having to beg from others for his daily needs. This man did not know Jesus or what he could do for him and therefore was not searching for him to ask him for help. But Jesus knowing the needs of the man, was the one who found him and began to shine his light on him that soon would change his life forever.

We quickly learn that Jesus will be shining his light on more than just this man born blind. In fact, Jesus reveals that his own disciples, the man's parents, the Pharisees, and the crowd of people that knew this man were just as blind spiritually, as the man who was blind physically.

The disciples' spiritual blindness is revealed from the very beginning as they attempt to use this man's physical blindness as a theological example and discussion. They believed that there was a direct correlation between sin and its corresponding punishment. The greater the sin, the greater the punishment. The disciples believed that it was either this man's sin or the sin of his parents that caused his life-long blindness. Jesus' disciples, the people around this man, maybe even his parents and many people still today feel if you do the right things, good things will come your way. If you are not receiving blessings from God, he must be withholding them from you because of something you have done wrong. The disciples had hoped that Jesus would give them a good grade for their quick assessment of this man's self-inflicted predicament in life or the possibility that his parents were the cause of having their child born blind. Jesus reveals to his disciples that the man's blindness was not to reveal the sin of certain people, but instead to reveal the goodness and works of God.

Then Jesus goes to work. Jesus is never asked by the blind man to give back his sight. Jesus doesn't check the calendar to avoid working on the Sabbath, although he knew it was the sabbath. Jesus could have waited just a few hours to perform the healing when it was no longer the sabbath or Jesus could have just spoken his word rather than mixing mud which also would have kept him also from breaking the sabbath, but Jesus reveals to everyone looking at him as he goes to work mixing mud and his saliva together that he was not bound to the commandments of Moses or any system that is of this world.

The method that Jesus chooses to use to give sight back to the blind man made no sense to the bystanders that day, nor does it to us today. Why would anyone choose to use an earthly element such as dirt and put it in the eyes of someone so that they can see clearly? Usually getting dirt in your eyes results in the opposite. Yet this is the very definition of a sacrament. To take an earthly element, give a person a command and deliver a promise. Sacraments are not intended to make sense. They deliver faith in places we cannot see. What sense does it make to apply an earthly element such as water on a child of God along with God's word that promises the gift of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life? What sense does it make to eat a wafer of bread and drink a small cup of wine and add to them the Words of Institution and believe that Jesus has forgiven every one of your sins? Again, Jesus is not limited to what makes sense to us, but delivers faith whenever, however and on whomever he chooses to shine his light.

After the man goes and washes in the pool of Siloam as Jesus commanded, what Jesus had promised, happens. The man who had been born blind can now see. His eyesight is restored, but his spiritual vision is still unclear. It's obvious that his problems certainly haven't gone away either. Even though this man who can now see should be able to provide for himself, no one believes this man when he describes how he was healed. His parents don't question that the person who was healed is their son, but they too are afraid to believe their son's story. They cannot believe what doesn't make sense to them. Of all the people who witnessed this miraculous healing, no one is willing to believe that Jesus, who they said was a sinner for working on the sabbath could also be a savior who would take away the sins of the world.

When the man receives his sight, he still has no idea who Jesus is. He was still blind when he was told to wash in the pool of water. When people ask him where the man who healed him is, he has no idea who to look for because he doesn't know what Jesus looks like. He might recognize his voice, but he wouldn't be able to identify him from anyone else by his looks. The man born blind got closer to Jesus after each encounter with him. When he was still blind, he simply described Jesus as "the man called Jesus". After his eyes were opened, he called him "a prophet". Jesus who saw the man in the beginning of the story has not yet come to know clearly or completely who Jesus is.

But this is not how this story ends. From the beginning, Jesus said that God's works would be revealed. Yes, the blind man's physical sight was restored, but the real work of God is to deliver faith. And this would not come from the man who could now see to find Jesus. What was still spiritually fuzzy for this man born blind would become crystal clear by Jesus finding this man again and speaking to him.

Jesus did not go to the temple to find this man. They had driven him out. But he had not been driven so far away that Jesus could not find him. When Jesus finds him, he asks the man, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He responded, "And who is he sir: Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." At this moment he received more than his sight, he received faith.

Jesus delivers to you his word today that you cannot be driven out of the sight of Jesus. Jesus will continue to pursue you and turn your doubts of who he is into faith in him alone. Jesus never denied that this man or his parents were sinners. Jesus does deny that the solution to your sin is to take you back to when your problem began to see if you can avoid making the mistake again. Jesus did not come to condemn the world. Jesus did not come after you to punish you, but to save you by forgiving your sins. Amen