

John 9:1-41

Fourth Sunday in Lent (Series A)

Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 42:14-21; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

The Great Ophthalmologist

March 19, 2023

“As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And 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 the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work 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.” Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent) . So he went and washed and came back seeing.” (John 9:1-7, ESV)

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Our text today is one of the longer Gospel readings in our lectionary. It isn’t the longest; the longest Gospel readings are those appointed for Holy Week, beginning with Passion Sunday, the day we also refer to as Palm Sunday, and continuing until Good Friday, when we go through the events of our Lord’s suffering and death for us on the cross. This one does stand out a bit, because it is different from most of the accounts of Jesus’ miracles. Most of the miracle accounts are rather brief. Take, for example, another occasion when the Lord healed a blind beggar. We hear how the beggar cried: *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* (Luke 18:38, ESV) Jesus commanded the man to be brought to Him and He asks the man: *“What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.”* (Luke 18:41-43, ESV) That’s it. A few verses, and we move on.

But now we not only hear how Jesus healed the man who was blind from birth, but we hear about the reaction of the neighbours. They are so amazed that someone who was born blind had been healed that they doubt at first that it is the same man. They are so astounded at this that they feel they need to consult the religious authorities, and so they take the healed man to the Pharisees. The Pharisees aren’t impressed by the healing; they are more concerned about the fact that this miracle was performed on the Sabbath. They also think that the whole miracle is a scam, maybe some effort on Jesus’ part to mislead gullible people. So they bring in the man’s parents. They want them to explain how this miracle occurred. All the parents can say is that the one who was healed was their son and that he had indeed been born blind, but they wouldn’t testify to what Jesus had done. We are told in our text that *“His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.”* (John 9:22, ESV)

Now the Pharisees question the man who had been born blind a second time. Again, their interest is not in the miracle or in the healing. What they want is to discredit Jesus; to have all the people believe that Jesus was sinner, breaking the Sabbath laws by making an ointment, even if it was only mud from dirt and spittle. They choose to make an example of this man for even suggesting that Jesus is a prophet, and they cast him out of the synagogue.

But there is still more. Jesus hears that the man has been cast out of the synagogue. This doesn’t just mean that they threw him out that day. They barred him from the synagogue. He was no longer welcome—at least, in the opinion of the Pharisees! But Jesus comes and leads the man to know that the One who heals the blind, the lame and all manner of illness is the Son of Man. Jesus uses the title ‘Son of Man’ for Himself. This title declares that though Jesus is fully man, He is much more. This was a messianic title, which pointed to the servant who would suffer and die for all people, but also spoke of the glorious victor whose Kingdom would endure forever. Now Jesus makes it clear that the very One who opened the eyes of this man born blind is the Son of Man and Saviour of the world.

Why such a long focus on one miracle? What is it about this miracle, in particular, that makes it necessary to have all

the events around it? This man's story is our story. This account holds before us the Great Ophthalmologist, the wonderful eye-doctor who can cure the most blinded of people. It focuses on the blindness from which we all suffer. Best of all, it points us to the One who opens our eyes and leads us into His light.

That theme of blindness and sight, darkness and light flow through our readings today. In our text we hear Jesus say: *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.* In our Old Testament lesson God speaks through Isaiah and says: *“And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them.”* (Isaiah 42:16, ESV) Paul tells us in our Epistle lesson: *“for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”* (Ephesians 5:8, ESV)

All these lessons, and especially our Gospel lesson, say something we don't want to hear and don't want to acknowledge. They declare that we, like that man, were born blind. We weren't born physically blind, but we were blind spiritually. If our blindness were a physical reality it would be harder for us to deny or ignore that blindness. Yet we often fail to see how blind we truly are. We don't see just how wicked, how spiteful, how self-righteous our actions are. Like the Pharisees, we don't see our sin. We see the sins of others, even as the disciples thought that the man whom Jesus healed was born blind either because of his sin or the sin of his parents. We can look down on others, because they don't fit our pattern or our expectations. We can be unforgiving, because we are so sure of our own righteousness that we see ourselves as better than others. Jesus' words to the Pharisees can be directed to us, too: *“If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”* (John 9:41, ESV)

That is why we need to come to Jesus Christ, the Great Ophthalmologist, that He might open our eyes. Jesus speaks of His mission and declares *“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”* (John 9:39, ESV) The Pharisees were blind-blinded by their self-righteousness; blinded by their unbelief. Without treatment, the effects of that blindness get worse. Throughout this chapter we see their darkness growing. First they accuse Jesus of being a Sabbath-breaker. Then they say that the One who came from heaven was not sent by God. They doubt the miracle and determine to expel and persecute anyone who confesses Jesus as Christ. They are so blind that they even say of the holy, sinless One: *“We know that this man is a sinner.”* (John 9:24, ESV) They are lost in the blindness of their sin.

But those who come to the Great Ophthalmologist are brought out of darkness into the light. We were born blind, blind in the sin that would condemn us to the eternal death of hell. Thankfully the Lord of Life, who healed that man who was born blind heals us, too. He removes the cataracts and scales that kept us from seeing His love and grace at work for us. The man who was blind was told to go and wash away the mud and spittle in the pool of Siloam. The Saviour leads us to the waters of Holy Baptism, and to the cleansing that this water with His Word brings to our lives. In that washing we receive the forgiveness that comes from our Saviour, who paid the price for our sins through His death on the cross. We who were in the dark now have the light and life that flows from His empty tomb and from His victory over death and the grave in His resurrection.

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! (LSB 744, st. 1) I have often heard from people who have had cataract surgery that they didn't realize how bad things were until the cataracts were removed. Some people who had long worn glasses now find that they can see without the glasses. What a blessing they feel in that renewed sight! That is what we find through the Great Ophthalmologist. Our eyes are open and we see. We see the blessings of the Saviour who died and rose for us. We see the blessings of forgiveness and life that He brings. We see the light of His truth to guide us day by day. How blessed we are to see all that is ours by His grace. Like that man born blind, what a blessing it is to say: “Lord, I believe,” and to join with the hymn writer who said: *“Praise the One who breaks the darkness With a liberating light; Praise the One who frees the pris'ners, Turning blindness into sight.”* (LSB 849, st. 1) Amen,