

The 4th Sunday of Lent: Holy Trinity Church: March 26, 2017

John 9:1-41: *Do You See with Gospel Eyes?*

Preached

By

The Rev. John E. Higginbotham

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

In this amazing and powerful gospel story in John 9 today, a man blind from birth has a dramatic eye opening experience with Jesus. Talk about new vision, talk about new insight, talk about being healed in mind, body and spirit. The blind man is completely and totally healed. He is made whole and he comes back from the pool of Siloam with vision and is now able to see perfectly for the first time in his life. His transformation is so complete and so dramatic that he even looks a little different. The townspeople see him and say: “Hey, isn’t that the blind beggar? He can see now. Is that him? No, it’s just someone who looks like him. It couldn’t be him,” And the former blind man says: “It’s me alright. I am the man.”

There is an interesting theological point here. The religious leaders of Jesus’ time had the mistaken notion that people who were sick and disabled were that way because either they had sinned or their parents sinned. Their sicknesses and disabilities were God’s judgment upon them for some kind of

wrongdoings. So these blind people, or lame people, or leprous people, or poor people were looked down upon by society as sinners, as wicked people and they were shunned. They were outcasts and marginalized. But Jesus didn't see nor did he judge them as sinners or as wicked people. He saw them as children of God, as persons of integrity and worth, as members of God's family, as His brothers and sisters and He loved them and embraced them and enjoyed them and most of all, Jesus healed them.

So here in John 9, Jesus goes over to the blind man to help him. Notice that when the disciples see the blind man, they don't see a human being. Instead, they see him as a topic for discussion, an issue to discuss, but when Jesus sees him, He sees a human being and he sees an opportunity to do something for this man. The disciples want to debate the truth about the blind man's situation. Jesus chooses to do something about it. The disciples want to give their energy to a lot of talk. Jesus puts His energies into action. The point is this: It's not enough to talk something to death. What pleases God is when we get up and do something. Jesus is trying to teach us something here. Notice, Jesus spits on the ground and makes mud with his saliva and spreads the mud on the man's eyes. Jesus could have easily said the word and the man would have been healed, but he is making a point to his disciples. Then what happens? Are the onlookers who witness this miracle happy? Absolutely not!

Why, because Jesus healed him on the Sabbath. Jesus broke the Mosaic Law. So, they bring the man to the Pharisees, those paragons of virtue to weigh in on this matter. The Pharisees come after the man with a vengeance. Then, they interrogate the healed man's parents and scare them out of their wits. Again, they interrogate the man who has been healed again and he gives them the powerful response that has resounded across the centuries. He says: "This one thing I know. Once I was blind, but now I see." You see, this man like most of us is a pragmatist. Look at what he is saying to their "hard-line" questioning! "I don't know about all of that. I don't know about your rules or regulations or restrictions, but I do know results when I see them. This one thing I do know. Once I was blind, but now I see." The Pharisees are defeated by this argument and they know it. So, they do what people often do when they feel insecure or have no moral high ground to stand upon. The Pharisees turn to violence. They excommunicate him. They push him out of the synagogue. Now, this sets the stage for one of the most beautiful moments in all of scripture. Jesus hears about his excommunication. He knows the man has been cast him out and shunned and Jesus comes to find him. Aware of his trouble, Jesus comes to him to do something. Jesus comes to help. That's the good news, isn't it? Jesus will always come to us when we are in trouble to help us. It is at times like this when we are sad and depressed, when we are

down and out, when we are broke and when we are broken, when we are in trouble that is when Jesus is closest to us. When Jesus finds the man in trouble He says to him: “Do you believe in me, the Son of God?” The healed man says: “Yes, Lord, I believe”... and he worships Him! It begs the question, will we do the same? Will we say the same? Will we say, “Yes, Lord, I believe?”

My brothers and sisters in Christ, our gospel story today is so packed with the stuff of life. There is blindness and sight, sickness and healing, prejudice and love, fear and faith, rejection and acceptance, defeat and victory. But, there is one question that explodes out of this gospel story and addresses itself directly and personally to you and me. Namely this, are we seeing people and our world with Gospel eyes, by Gospel eyes I mean are we seeing people and our world through the eyes of Jesus? Have our Gospel eyes been truly opened by the actions of Jesus Christ? Let’s ask ourselves this question, can I see with the vision of our Lord? Have my eyes been opened with the spirit of Jesus Christ? Let me give you an example, what is going on inside of you when you are stopped at a traffic light and a homeless man or woman is standing in the intersection holding up a sign begging for money to eat, do you immediately make sure the car door is locked, windows are all the way up and under no circumstances making eye contact? If and when you look at him or her do you see just the alcoholic, the drug addict, the degenerate gambler, the ex-

convict, the prostitute, the bum? Now let us ask this question, if we were to look through Jesus eyes, what do you think Jesus would we see?

Jesus brings us up short because time and again in the gospels he makes it very clear that the things that blind us most is our own fear and selfishness.

The only cure for our blindness is to have our eyes opened with Jesus' vision that we find in the gospels.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, Holy Week draws near, so my challenge for you during this 4th week of Lent, on this Laetare Sunday is one of conversion.

Challenge yourself to see with Gospel eyes by moving from "That belongs to me" to "I belong to that!" That's what it means to have Jesus Gospel eyes, to move from a selfish vision of people and the world to a service vision of people and the world, to move from "Do something for me" to "Let me do something and be something for God and my sisters and brothers." Reflect upon your life, are your gospel eyes wide open and ready to see? Can you see beyond your own selfish desires? Can you see yourself not as one to be selfishly pampered, but as one committed to being God's servant, God's disciple in this world? Because when you do, when your eyes are opened it changes the way you see all kinds of people and when that happens it changes your way of life forever.

There was a mom who took her children to a crowded restaurant one day.

Her six-year-old son asked if he could say grace. He prayed: “God is great and God is good, Let us thank him for the food and God I would thank you even more if Mom gets us ice cream for dessert. And liberty and justice for all! Amen!” Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby, the woman at the very next table growled loudly: “That’s what’s wrong with this country. Kids today don’t even know how to pray. The very idea of asking God for ice cream! Why, I never.”

Hearing this, the little six-year-old boy burst into tears and he asked his mother: “Did I do it wrong, Mommy? I’m sorry. Is God mad at me?” The little boy’s mother pulled him over into her lap. She hugged him tightly and assured him that he had done a terrific job with his prayer and God was certainly not mad at him. Just then an elderly gentleman walked over to the table. He winked at the little boy and he said: “I know God really well. We visit every day and I happen to know that God loved your prayer. It may have been the best one God has heard all day.” “Really?” the little boy asked. “Cross my heart,” said the man. Then he leaned over and whispered into the little boy’s ear. Pointing at the woman at the next table who had made the remark that started the whole thing, he said: “Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes. Who knows, it may sweeten her disposition.”

Naturally, the mom ordered ice cream for her kids at the end of the meal. The little six-year-old boy stared at his for a moment and then he did something that no one in that restaurant that day will ever forget. He picked up his sundae and without a word walked over and placed it in front of the woman at the next table. With a big smile he said to her: “Here, this is for you. Ice cream is sweet and good for the soul sometimes and my soul is good already!” The people in the restaurant applauded and somewhere in heaven I know Jesus was smiling because that little boy had already learned how to look at others with the eyes of sacrificial love, with Gospel eyes.

My dear sisters and brothers, sight (true sight) is always a matter of the heart and gospel eyes are the windows to the soul. When we see with our hearts and we realize what Jesus taught so long ago was that we are all in this together, that we are all people for whom Jesus Christ came and died on the cross, only then do we see people differently, then we are able to see beyond the stranger, only then do we see beyond the addiction only then do we see beyond the disabilities and when we see beyond, then we no longer see a bum we are no longer reviled because now we see a child of God and a brother and sister. We see every human being as part of God’s family, and love them even when they are unlovable by treating them with dignity and respect only then have we done something. That’s what it means to have Gospel eyes. When our eyes

have been opened by Jesus, it changes the way we see ourselves, it changes the way we see other people. It turns us from all talk to action and in the process it changes our lives.

If you remember one thing to carry out of this church and into your week, I want you to notice the way the healed man refers to Jesus. Notice his growth in faith. There is a magnificent progression here as he sees more and more clearly. First, the blind man refers to Jesus as a Man. He says “The man Jesus did this for me.” Next, He calls Jesus a Prophet. He says: “To be able to do this he must be a Prophet.” Then in that intimate moment at the end when Jesus finds him, face to face, he sees Jesus as the Son of God. And finally, he claims Him as “The Lord of His Life.” Do you see my brothers and sisters, the closer you get to Jesus and the more time you spend with Jesus the clearer you will see God! And that’s the way it works for us, because the only way to truly see God is to see God through Jesus’ eyes, through Gospel eyes. Amen.