

Third Sunday in Lent  
March 3, AD 2002  
"A Judgment of Blindness or Sight"  
John 9:1-7,13-17,34-39

*Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Micheel*

**Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love. (2 John 8)**

We give our attention again to the Gospel of the Day, from John, chapter nine.  
**1 As he went 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 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.**

**13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. 17 Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet."**

**34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." (NIV)**

Christian author John Killinger tells the story of a man who visited a classroom for visually impaired children. Troubled by what he saw, the man blurted out loudly and insensitively, "It must be terrible to go through life without sight."

A little girl, a student in the classroom, heard what the man said and quickly responded, "It's not half as bad as going through life with sight and still not being able to see."

She had a point didn't she? Blindness, being without physical eyesight, seems to those of us with sight to be a terrible condition. Even worse, though, as that little girl noted, is a different kind of blindness. The kind of blindness she referred to is a blindness affecting the soul. It is a blindness to truth, to reality, to the working of the grace of God.

Jesus encountered this blindness in John chapter nine. Jesus also came into contact with people who could see—at least they thought they could. And in each case, after an encounter with Jesus, things were different. Jesus put it this way: *For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.* "For judgment I have come into this world..." When a judgment is issued in a courtroom, things are never the same for the person on trial. In the same way, Jesus came to make a difference, and he did. He still does. As the people in John nine saw, things aren't the same after Jesus takes action. After an encounter with Jesus, those who see will become blind, and the blind will see.

The question for you and me is, which one of those two will we be?

### **1. After an encounter with Jesus, the "seeing" become blind**

Looking at the people in the cast of characters in this chapter, who looks best, based on outward appearances? Isn't it these men called Pharisees? The Pharisees were a group, a sect, of observant Jewish men. Just about anywhere they went, they would have looked the best.

To the Pharisees, things were crystal clear. When it came to God, they thought of themselves as having 20/20 vision. They knew what God wanted—he wanted them to be better than others. He wanted them to be a cut above your average "sinner." He wanted them to observe more laws more strictly than everyone else. And if they did, they assumed that God would give them a pat on the back and a reward. In their minds, they saw everything clearly.

But as this chapter reveals, they didn't see everything they thought they saw. They focused so much on how victorious they were in their battle to be holy that they lost sight of their failures. They spent so much energy comparing themselves to others that they neglected to really take stock of themselves. They looked at their own works so much that they lost sight of God's works. You can tell this by the way they talk in this chapter. The Pharisees spend their time evaluating Jesus based on how well he's keeping the Sabbath laws. They evaluate the blind man and his parents based on his condition, which they assume to be the result of some grievous sin. What they don't see is that they need God to rescue them from their own sin. They don't see that Jesus is God's rescue plan in the flesh. The light

of the world is shining in all his brilliance right in front of them, and they don't see him.

The first Scripture reading we heard today (Isaiah 42:14-21) describes the situation Jesus encountered. The very people who had God's plan laid out for them in his Word-they were the ones who were blind to the truth! Instead they turned away to idols. In the case of the Pharisees, the idols they worshiped were themselves.

Stupid, stupid Pharisees. How could they be so blind? Certainly if we had been in their sandals, we would have seen the Light.

Right?

Before we condemn the Pharisees, we should remember again who they were. They were the churchgoing folk. They were the people who tried hard to do what was right. They were the people who steadfastly opposed the moral decline in society. They were the "good people."

If they could be blind to the truth, couldn't we also? We could. By nature we are. And that natural blindness to the truth still clings to us Christians and shows itself often. We do not see things as they really are. We imagine ourselves to be okay in God's sight because of how we're performing, when really we are not okay. We see ourselves as measuring up to God's standards, when really we do not, since God demands not just a good effort, but perfect performance. We see ourselves doing okay, when in reality things between us and God are anything but okay.

The Pharisees' encounter with Jesus encounter with Jesus does not end well. These men, who claimed that they could see, are exposed as being blind. In fact, after this run in with Jesus, they are confirmed in their blindness more than ever. Instead of admitting their blindness and seeing what God had placed in front of them, they insisted they could see. By doing so they missed out on seeing God's light. What Jesus said was true: those who thought they saw had become blind.

Based on what happened with the Pharisees, which do you think Jesus wants us to do: insist that we can see things just fine on our own, or admit that we are blind and have him give us sight?

## **2. After an encounter with Jesus, the blind will see**

If we said that the Pharisees looked the best based on outward appearances, we'd have to say that the man born blind looks the worst. He sits on the street begging, which is about the best job a blind man in Biblical times could have. And more than that, he's looked down upon as someone who committed a great sin-why else would he be blind?

We know how things went. The man encountered Jesus, who spoke to him

personally, who touched him gently, who gave him his eyesight. That certainly was a miracle. Jesus did with his power what teams of the most gifted doctors still cannot do.

Yet I would maintain that a miracle even greater than that took place that day. Even more amazing than what was happening on a physical level was what was going on on a spiritual level.

The blind man's honesty is refreshing in contrast to the Pharisees, who think they've got it all figured out. The Pharisees ask him what happened. "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see!" Who is this man? "He's a prophet, someone from God, of course." They keep pressing him; what happened? who is this man? "I don't know. This I do know: I was blind, but now I see!" Even as Jesus talks with him, the man doesn't pretend to have all the answers. Rather, he lets Jesus provide them. He admits that spiritually he's in the dark, and into his darkness shines Jesus.

Jesus speaks to the man. He tells him who he is. He is the Son of Man, the one God promised would come to set things right again between God and the people of the world. He is the light of the world. He pierces the darkness of sin by destroying sin's power. He came, sent by the Father, to take on himself the sins of the world and to be punished for them. He came to die for us-and more, to rise again to life. Where there was only death, Jesus has brought life and immortality to light. He is the light of the world.

The man's reaction? As God works through the good news spoken to the man, he believes it. God has done even more than bring light to the man's physical eyes. He has brought the light of life to his soul.

The good news God has for us today is that Jesus has done no less for us. Just as the blind man was powerless to see, so are we powerless to see and believe the truth. God must reveal it to us, and his power must give us sight. He does. The Holy Spirit works powerfully as we hear the good news about Jesus, as we receive his body and blood. He brings light to people through the washing of baptism (for that reason the lighting of a candle when someone is baptized is a custom in many places). Jesus Christ pierces the darkness "with a liberating light." Freeing us, forgiving us, he turns our blindness into sight.

I've read that in parts of Southeast Asia, it is illegal to bring Christian material into the country. Boxes of books are inspected, and Bibles are weeded out. Bibles still come into those countries, though. Sometimes Bibles are shipped into the country that the inspectors can't read. That's because they are written in Braille. The inspectors let them pass, and so, some of the only Bibles in the country belong to the blind. They then read the Braille and transmit the message to other people hungry for God's Word.

That's typical of God, isn't it? That's typical of Jesus. Those who, on the outside,

seem the best off end up the worst off. And those who seem the worst off end up the best off.

For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind. Which of these are we? Are we those who claim they can see, who are being confirmed more and more in our blindness? Or are we those who freely confess to being blind, because without God we are? By the grace of God, the love of Jesus and the working of the Holy Spirit, we can say what the man born blind said: "I was blind, but now I see!" *Amen.*