

Sermon 3-15-26
Pastor Ray Lorthioir
Trinity Lutheran Church
W. Hempstead, NY

Based on the Gospel Lesson for The Fourth Sunday in Lent, John 9:1-41.

Now I See

Each of the four gospel writers is an editor of material about Jesus. Matthew and John were apostles. So they were up close to Jesus. And, John declares himself very close to Jesus. Indeed, Matthew, Mark and Luke confirm this. Mark was a disciple. He was around Jesus for at least part of His ministry. Luke was probably a gentile convert who was very diligent about collecting the best Jesus information and placing it in a correct world timeline.

During this year's Lent, we're listening to several of the major events in John's Gospel. So far we've seen Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus and Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman. Today it's Jesus' conversation with the man born blind. Next week, will be Jesus' conversation with the family of Lazarus whom He raised from the dead.

John's gospel is unique among the four in that it's full of dialogues that Jesus had with other people. It's not only full of these dialogues, but it centers on the dialogues. And John reports these dialogues as an eye-witness or as one who had strong connection with the eye-witnesses.

In John, the people who dialogue with Jesus want to know who He is. Jesus didn't always answer directly. He often used parables. But once the parable was understood, it's clear that Jesus was not afraid to let it be known who He is.

In the course of the dialogues, Jesus described some of the work of the Messiah. He also spoke of the benefits of His work for believers. He also taught the people He dialogued with, and us, how we need to respond to Him.

For instance, Jesus told Nicodemus that He was the bringer of the Kingdom of God. He told Nicodemus that only those born again or born from above would be able to recognize Him as much more than a rabbi. Only those born again would be able to see Jesus as the King of the Kingdom of God. Jesus also told Nicodemus that we can enter the Kingdom of God, but to do so we must be born of water through Holy Baptism into the Lord Jesus Christ and born of the Spirit through God the Holy Spirit. Lastly, Jesus told Nicodemus that He would fulfill an Old Testament type — namely the fiery serpent bronze statue that Yahweh ordered Moses to lift up on a pole, so that all Israelites bitten by the fiery serpents could look at it and be saved from the judgment and death due them for their sin of rebellion. In other words, anyone who looks to Jesus lifted up on the cross and in resurrection can likewise escape the judgment and death due them because of Original Sin and their own personal sins. Forgiveness of sin paid for by the suffering of Messiah Jesus is extended to all who look to Jesus in repentance.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well that He would be the one to unite bitter enemies, Israel and Samaria, in the worship of Yahweh. This would be because Yahweh would no longer dwell in temple buildings, but would dwell in the hearts of His people who would worship Him in Spirit and in truth. He told the Samaritan woman that He would be the one to pour out Yahweh's Holy Spirit on all people, so that all could be turned from

rebellion and sin to righteousness. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that He is indeed the Messiah.

We're not told the result of Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus. We're left to guess. But we are told the result of Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman. She went skipping into town blabbering all over the place that she had just met someone who fit the description of the Messiah that Samaritans believed would come, and that they should all come to the well and see for themselves. And that's precisely what the people of Sychar did. They even invited Jesus to stay and teach them for a number of days — an invitation from Samaritans that would never have been given to an ordinary rabbi from the hated Jews.

In the episode of the man born blind, Jesus was back in Judea. In contrast to Matthew, Mark and Luke, the majority of the events in John's gospel take place in Judea. John describes some events in Galilee and of course, Samaria. But Judea is the center of the action. And while Jesus was accepted to a certain degree in Galilee and wildly accepted in Samaria, Judea was another matter. As we've already seen in the reading of the gospel lesson, Jesus was resisted. The man who advocated for Him was resisted. No wonder Judea put Jesus to death.

The text today opened in a strange way with the disciples wondering about a beggar they had encountered on the streets of Jerusalem who had been born blind. In Jesus' time, tragic life circumstances were associated with sin on the person's part. Not that such a thing can't happen. Sexually transmitted diseases happen for a reason. Sin. It's the same with poverty and death from addictions, for example.

However, that a newborn infant would be guilty of considerable sin just doesn't resonate with us. We consider being born blind to be a tragic circumstance, but not an indication of guilt from sin. And even Jesus' positive answer is a little hard for us to take. He said that the beggar had been born blind and had had to suffer blindness for forty years for the glory of God. He was born blind so that God could give him sight through a spectacular miracle.

Now, one of the things about miracles is that they can be faked — especially in a crowd of strangers. A supposedly lame person could stand up and walk out of a wheelchair at a large meeting where very few people know each other. Everyone might be amazed. But if no one knows the person, could that person be a plant to deceive the participants? Could that person just be faking lameness in order to let the organizers of the meeting proclaim a miracle? Such things have been done.

But not in the case of the man born blind. Everyone in Jerusalem had encountered this man. They had seen him for years. He was forty years old. His family was known. His circumstances from birth were well known. Therefore, if suddenly this man could see with 20/20 vision, he would be no plant by a fake miracle worker. He would be the real thing — one upon whom the grace of God had fallen.

So, this is why Jesus said what He said. Yahweh had given this particular man a particular fate in life so that Yahweh could reveal His sovereign power in him. And everyone would know that the miracle was real. And everyone would know that the person through whom the miracle was performed was no ordinary person. But just who was this miracle worker? That's the big question.

Jesus gave His answer to this question in his usual oblique way just before He performed the miracle by saying to His disciples in John 9:5, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Two things here. The Name Yahweh means I AM WHO I AM. For

short, Yahweh's Name is I AM. You can read about that in Exodus chapter 3. So, any time Jesus said I AM this or that, He was revealing who He really is — Yahweh, the Son.

Second, Jesus' saying is a parable. Physical light is something Yahweh created, not something Yahweh is. Therefore, when Jesus claimed to be the light of the world, He meant that because He's the Creator of this world, He's the real truth about this world. He's the real knowledge. Thus, anyone who believes what Jesus said is walking in the light of their Creator's truth and knowledge. They are walking in the light of God's real reality, not the darkness of the evil one's deceptions.

It's interesting that Jesus just made mud with spit and put it on the blind man's eyes. He didn't ask the man's permission. Being blind the man had no idea what Jesus was doing. We don't know if he even knew who Jesus is. But when he felt the mud on his eyes, the man didn't object. And even more marvelous, he didn't object, but obeyed the command to blindly find his way to the pool of Siloam and wash his face in the water. This makes me think of the miracle the prophet Elisha performed when he sent the Syrian general, Naaman, to the Jordan River to wash seven times. You can read about that in 2Kings, chapter 5.

The real "fun" of this incident began when the man came back with perfect 20/20 vision. John 9:8-12, "8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' 9 Some said, 'It is he.' Others said, 'No, but he is like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' 10 So they said to him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' 11 He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." So I went and washed and received my sight.' 12 They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'"

Isn't it wild how people who could see couldn't believe their eyes when they saw the blind man seeing? I can understand. It was shocking to the point of unbelievability. But these neighbors and friends seemed stupefied by what they saw. For, instead of praising God for a previously unheard of miracle, and instead of seeking out Jesus, these neighbors hauled the man off to the Pharisees.

What on earth did the Pharisees have to do with this? The only thing I can figure out is that the neighbors were so stunned that they wanted those with religious authority to pronounce the miracle bona fide — a genuine good work. But why the neighbors couldn't decide for themselves is perverse. It's typical of the way we perverse sinners behave before the goodness of our Creator God.

And just as perverse was the reaction of the authorities when they were confronted with the miracle. For Jesus had performed the miracle on the holy Sabbath Day. Here's the command Moses received about the Sabbath. Leviticus 23:3, "'Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places.'" Jews have struggled to define work and rest ever since.

Here in this Orthodox Jewish neighborhood, people are in a quandary when they walk at night. For apparently the rabbis have ruled that if they pass by a light with a motion sensor and the light goes on, they have performed work forbidden on the Sabbath. There are still gentiles in this neighborhood, like us. And so going down the path through the church property will cause a motion sensor light to go on. But I'm the rabbi on this property. And I side with Jesus' interpretation of work on the Sabbath. After all, He's the one who gave the commandment. And if anyone should know how to interpret the commandment, it's Him.

Here's the ruling Jesus gave that covers all Sabbath situations. Mark 2:27-28, "27... 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.'" In other words, every seventh day, there is a God appointed and God approved break from all the daily drudgery necessary to feed, clothe, house and otherwise keep ourselves and our families. However, on that seventh day we're free to do God's work. This includes healing the sick. It also includes opening eyes blind to God — even opening physically blind eyes, especially if you're Messiah.

So, without Jesus present, the Pharisees interrogated the man born blind. After finding out how he had been healed, the question about who Jesus is was raised. We read in John 9:16-17, "16 Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' And there was a division among them. 17 So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?' He said, 'He is a prophet.'" So here we have three opinions. Jesus is a sinner. Jesus is not a sinner. Jesus is a prophet. Which one will win out?

Just to make sure that the healing of the blind man was not a hoax, the leadership even called in his parents. They confirmed that he was born blind. But the man's parents dodged the question of how he could now see. The reason is given in John 9:22, "(His parents . . . 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.)"

Now, John was a Jew. But he was in deep disagreement with his fellow Jews over who Jesus is. Therefore, in his gospel, John frequently labels those opposed to Jesus as "the Jews." And this is especially a label that John pins on the Jewish leadership that rejected Jesus. Thus, it seems like the blind man's parents secretly believed that Jesus had to be Messiah if He could open the eyes of their blind son. Only they were afraid to openly confess the fact in front of the Jewish leadership.

John 9:24-25, "24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, 'Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.' 25 He answered, 'Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.'" Notice how the position of the Pharisees had hardened. It seems as if they were all now in agreement that performing a healing on the Sabbath made Jesus a sinner. However, the formerly blind man refused that interpretation. I was once blind, but now I see. Surely such a miracle counts for something. Doesn't it?

John 9:26 "They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?'" Having determined that the miracle wasn't fake, the Pharisees instead focused in on the exact method Jesus used to heal. Since they had previously accused Jesus of using demonic sorcery to perform miracles, it sounds like they were probing to see if there was any sorcery involved.

With the Pharisees' question, the conversation dissolved into a bitter disagreement. John 9:27-34, "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 And 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, 'Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not

from God, he could do nothing.’ 34 They answered him, ‘You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?’ And they cast him out.”

If you remember from two weeks ago, Nicodemus began his dialogue with Jesus by saying in John 3:2, “. . . ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.’” Who did Nicodemus mean by “we?” Was he speaking for the leadership? Was he speaking for other Pharisees. If he was, then something had drastically changed. By chapter 9 a significant number of Pharisees were unwilling to come to the first baby-step conclusion about Jesus — that He was obviously a teacher come from God. However, the man who could now see was able to arrive at that first baby-step conclusion — by “seeing.” And he was willing not only to confess it publicly, but he publicly ridiculed the Pharisees for their perverse blindness. In retaliation, the Pharisees publicly rejected the blind man’s conclusion and denounced him as a godless sinner simply because he had been born blind. And so, the initial question of the incident was revisited. Was this man’s blindness a judgment of God against him, or was it, as Jesus said, an opportunity for God to show His glory? What do you think?

In the final part of the episode, the man born blind met Jesus. Jesus led the man beyond his initial baby-step confession that Jesus was from God and all the way to the truth. John 9:35-38, “35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ 36 He answered, ‘And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?’ 37 Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.’ 38 He said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped him.”

The term “Son of Man” comes from a vision the prophet Daniel had. Daniel 7:13-14, “13 ‘In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.’” (NIV)

The key thing about this Son of Man figure is that He is worthy of worship. Since Yahweh alone is worthy of worship, therefore, this one like a Son of Man must also be Yahweh — God the Son. So, it’s clear by his behavior that the man formerly blind totally got the drift when Jesus used the title “Son of Man” to identify Himself. For, the man worshipped Jesus. And Jesus didn’t refuse his worship. Wow.

There was one more thing. John 9:39-41, “39 Jesus said, ‘For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.’ 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, ‘Are we also blind?’ 41 Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, “We see,” your guilt remains.’”

Judgment is rightly deciding innocence and guilt; righteousness and rebellion; good and evil. This is what a judge does every time he pronounces a judgment. Therefore, the innocent are divided from the guilty; the righteous from the rebellious; the good from the evil. Thus, when Jesus said He came for judgment, He meant He came to separate people — those who have been enabled to confess Him as Messiah from those who reject Him. And He is quite adamant about the fact that those who reject Him are blind to the Truth about Him.

Is it not prophesied in Messiah’s life script that He would do what no other prophet before Him had done and open the eyes of the blind? We read in Isaiah 35:4-6, “4 Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with

vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.’ 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; 6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”

Thus, the answer is absolutely “Yes.” When Jesus gave sight to the man born blind, it should have been absolutely clear to everyone who He is. It should be absolutely clear to all of us as well. Otherwise, we’re blind and guilty.

Therefore, may it be that by the grace of God we can all sing with vigor, the words in John Newton’s famous hymn: “I once was blind, but now I see.” May it be so, Lord. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.