

Sermon – John 9:1-41  
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4 Lent – Year A  
26 March 2017

“That’s How the Light Gets In”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace to you and peace in the name of God the Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Well, after that lengthy gospel reading, you may be thinking to yourselves, “We don’t even need a sermon today.” To which I can only reply: Too bad. This wonderful text simply has too much going on for me to pass up the opportunity. Blindness, after all, has been on my mind. This is the season of blindness, or perhaps the season when the blindness of others becomes obvious to us. It is March Madness, with college basketball tournaments set to determine champions for both men and women. While the referees usually get things right, sometimes it seems they are simply blind – and we can all see it. This was perhaps most true last weekend when local favorite Northwestern – finally in the tournament! – had cut a 22-point deficit to five with five minutes to go when Wildcat Dererk Pardon went up for a slam-dunk. A Gonzaga defender blocked the shot, but had clearly put his hand through the hoop, and should have been called for goaltending. The ref somehow, impossibly, missed the call. Coach Collins was given a technical foul when he pointed out the obvious, Gonzaga was awarded free throws, and the game was as good as over from that point on. It’s easy for us to see when others have failed to see.
2. Blindness and sight – these are the contrasts at play in the ninth chapter of John’s gospel. The setting is the Festival of Booths in Jerusalem, a celebration of God’s presence with the people as they journeyed through the wilderness from bondage into freedom. In remembrance of the pillar of fire by which

God showed them the way through the darkness, the people would build four huge lampstands that lit up the city. It is in the midst of this celebration that Jesus earlier proclaimed himself to be the Light of the World, the One who would now lead God's people to freedom. Light and darkness. Sight and blindness. But who in this story sees? How do they see and what do they see?

3. The story centers on Jesus' miraculous healing of a man born blind, but it is the interactions that swirl around the healing that are so telling. The story begins with Jesus noticing the unnamed man. His disciples are blind to the man, noticing only his condition, his circumstances, his blindness. They want to have a theological conversation about the man, wondering who sinned to bring him to such a state, because there's always someone to blame, isn't there? The neighbors see the man who can now see, and fail to see him for who he is. The Pharisees, following the healing, see only how Jesus has broken the law, specifically the law prohibiting healing on the Sabbath, not to mention the kneading of the mud used in the healing, for kneading itself was prohibited on this holy day. I like to think that Jesus choose to get his hands into the dirt and spit and knead it all together simply to get a dig at the Pharisees' unbending interpretation of the Law. Even the man's parents are unable to see fully, blinded by their fear of the religious authorities. The disciples, the neighbors, the parents, the Pharisees – all people with perfectly functional eyes who fail to see what's right in front of their noses: the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, banishing the darkness and opening eyes to behold the glory of God.
4. In the end, there are only two here who see, first Jesus, and then the man whose eyes have been opened. Whereas the disciples see only the man's blindness, Jesus *sees the man*, the person, a child of God whose blindness is not a reason to explore the doctrine of sin but instead an opportunity for Jesus to reveal something about himself. *Jesus sees the man*; Jesus is the One who sees. He spreads mud on his eyes – no doubt a surprise to the blind man

as he never asked for it – and sends him to the pool of Siloam, which means Sent. The One sent by God sends the man to Sent, and the man receives his sight. And seeing, not only with newly opened eyes but also with Spirit-given sight, the man believes. Seeing Jesus who first saw him, the man sees everything.

5. And the others? The disciples and neighbors, the parents and Pharisees? Well, it's tempting to rush onto the court at this point, wildly clamoring about their blindness. How do they fail to see Jesus? To which we can only reply, they are us. We are the ones who insist on seeing others in terms of condition or circumstance rather than as full human beings. We are the ones who pigeonhole others and can't recognize that they are more than we once thought. We are the ones who are blinded by our fears. We are the ones who are certain that God has to act in the way we think God should act, not as some itinerant healer getting his hands dirty. We, in our willful sinfulness, are the ones whose eyes need to be opened; opened to the glory of God in Christ that convicts us of our need to see the blindness of others while ignoring our own.
  
6. But we are also the Ones to whom Christ has come, sending us to be washed not in mud and spit but in the waters of baptism. Jesus proclaims that the path to vision goes through repentance, through admitting and acknowledging our failure to see our neighbors fully and, even more, for our failure to see God. As we continue through Lent, we begin – all of us – by acknowledging our need. We are broken, blind, cracked. But as the late Canadian poet Leonard Cohen once sang, "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." In admitting the cracks in ourselves, acknowledging our own blindness, we can begin to see the light. It is a light that begins in darkness, when Christ himself was broken on Calvary's cross, God's glory hidden in suffering and death. It is a light that shatters our darkness once and for all, lighting up the night with the grandeur of God,

leading you from slavery into freedom. Jesus has been sent for you. Jesus sees *you*. And seeing you, loves you; and loving you, heals you. You, who once were blind: Open your eyes and see Jesus, the light of the world. The world will never look the same again. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, today and forever. Amen.