

Sermon – John 9:1-41
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Grace Lutheran Church
4 Lent – Year A
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“Eyes of Faith”

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

1. Lying on the wet ground last Friday, I found myself thinking a number of things. Insightful things like, “ouch” and “I should seek medical attention.” But I was also thinking, “I hope no one saw that.” I had just suffered a fall; not a slip or a stumble, but a fall without warning or control. The sort of thing that happens when one takes out the trash while foolishly wearing old flip flops and steps on a garden bed liner slick with rain. Not for the first time will I say that I’m glad a dislocated finger was the worst of it. I was a bit embarrassed, frankly, and truly hoped my accident had gone unnoticed by others. At the same time, I needed to be seen by someone if I was going to get the help I needed.
2. We may not always want to look squarely at our own needs and vulnerabilities. At the same time, we yearn to be seen. Not just noticed, and not just for our needs, but to be truly seen. To be found, known, loved. The first thing that happens today in the story of the man born blind is seeing. As Jesus was walking along, he sees this man. Jesus is the only one who does. The disciples only see the man’s blindness and wonder about whose sin is to blame. As the narrative unfolds, the man is tossed about at the center of a theological debate. But Jesus? Jesus sees him. In his need and vulnerability and as the person God created, stamped indelibly with the *imago dei*. Jesus sees him. And Jesus opens the man’s eyes in every way possible; first to the

world around him and then to the reality of who Jesus is: the Light of the world that no darkness can overcome.

3. The question asked by the disciples rings oddly in our ears. We don't tend to think that God hands out suffering or illness because of sin. But perhaps it's not so different than those cries that emerge in the wake of diagnosis or loss. Why me? What did she do to deserve this? It's not fair! While Jesus dismisses the idea that the man or his parents are to blame, he does not give us a dissertation on the causes of suffering. Instead, he enters in. He sees and does not stay far off. Jesus, the Word who was in the beginning, speaks. The God who formed us from the dust now makes mud and brings new life to this man. While the miracle of new sight points to Jesus' identity and power, it is the creation of new eyes of faith to see and know Jesus that shows forth God's purposes. The healing points to the true grace, which is Jesus' presence with us in all circumstances. Illness and disability remain part of life, after all, not signs of God's displeasure. As the preacher Liv Larson Andrews writes, the community gathered around Jesus is "one where all bodies are treasured fully as they are, not as means to an end." We are all in need of the same thing, and we all receive it freely: Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. His judgment of this world's sin and blindness leads not to condemnation, but to a new vision to see God at work in this world, and a glimpse, too, of the world to come.

4. A few Wednesdays ago, we sang the one of the great American hymns, "Blessed Assurance." The words were written by Fanny Crosby. Crosby was a prolific writer. She wrote almost 9,000 hymns (about 9,000 more than me), often under pseudonyms because publishers were a bit uncomfortable having so many hymns by one person in the same book. She was incredibly gifted and faithful. She also happened to be blind, possibly from birth or possibly the result of mistreatment for an illness when she was a few weeks old. She never did receive her sight in a miracle, but she saw Jesus clearly.

She has helped generations of the faithful sing of “visions of rapture” and “echoes of mercy, whispers of love.” Fanny Crosby was blind, but she saw what was most important with crystal clarity. She saw Jesus and she knew that he is made visible in this world through acts of mercy and love.

5. By the end of today’s confrontation, the roles have been reversed. The man born blind sees in multiple ways while the religious leaders – so certain of how God works – are blind to what God is now doing. Such blindness lingers, of course. Humans continue to prefer the shadow of war. Of hate and violence and power and lies and false religion that ignores the cries of the poor. We continue in sin. We continue to walk in death’s dark valley. But Jesus stands before you today once more. He sees you. You who were blind, look! You who were trapped in sin, be free. You are forgiven. You who were dead, live. Living as children of the light, signs of visible mercy and love for all the world to see. Christ calls you, and when Christ calls, new purpose is given. Here at Grace, we live into this purpose, to grow in grace, live with love, and go to serve. Your eyes are open. Live as children of light. Look ever to Jesus and listen as he sends you forth. Amen.

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