

Recognizing the Work of God

John 9:1-41

March 22, 2020

Children's Message:

I am going to do a trick with your eyes. I am going to put a hole in your hand, and I am going to make you hand disappear. Ready? I am going to give you a paper towel tube. Put the tube up to one eye and look through it. Keep both your eyes open. Now, take your other hand, put it in front of your face, palm facing your face and slowly bring your hand toward the paper towel tube...until it touches the side of the tube.

Do you see the “hole” in your hand? Now, close the eye that is not covered by the tube. Did your hand disappear? Open your eye. It reappears again!

The eyes are an amazing thing. You have two eyes and it takes both of them to make a proper picture. Did you know that your eyes can see over 10 million different variations of color?! And your eyes can focus on fifty objects in a second!

In a few minutes, I am going to read a story in the Bible about a man who was born blind. Put your hands over your eyes. You can't see anything. This man was like that his whole life. Well, Jesus sees him, and heals the man so he can see again.

Do you know how Jesus did this? He used mud! He took some dirt from the ground, spit on it and made some mud. Then he pressed the mud onto the blind man's eyes, and told him to wash it off in the local pool. The man did so, and he could see for the first time in his life.

Now what is strange about this story is that people were upset by what Jesus did. You would think people would be happy for this man who can now see. But no, all they could think about is that Jesus worked on the Sabbath (like our Sunday today), or how could Jesus do this if he was just a man.

But Jesus said, I am the light of the world. I bring light in the darkness.

Things are little scary right now. AJ, I heard your camp was cancelled. A lot of things are cancelled. And we don't know how long this will last. But Jesus said, Don't be afraid. I am the light of the world. I am with you.

This is a promise.

Thank you, Jesus, for being the light of the world. We trust in you. Amen.

Give instructions for people to obtain Bibles. Our scripture passage today is from the Gospel of John, chapter 9.

Jesus and his disciples walk by a blind man. The disciples notice him, turn to Jesus and ask, “Jesus, who’s sin caused this man blindness, the man or his parents?” Jesus said, Neither. The work of God is going to be displayed in this man.

Jesus takes some dirt from the ground, spits on it, makes some mud and places it the man’s eyes. I can imagine Jesus pressing his hands on the man’s eyes. Jesus then instructs the man to wash it off in the local pool. The man does so and can see.

It’s a miracle! But what is so interesting about this story are people’s reactions to the healing of the blind man. The author of John tells the healing part of the story in 2 verses. The author takes 39 verses to record people’s reactions. It is the reactions of people that are important to this story.

*First, you have the disciples who were more concerned about what caused the man’s blindness, not so much about the man’s plight, what it is like to be blind.

*Next, the reaction of his neighbors. I will start reading at verse 8:

⁸His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹Some claimed that he was.

Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

¹⁰“How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

¹¹He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

¹²“Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

His neighbors don't recognize him. Perhaps never really noticed him at all. He is just one of those people on the edges. All they cared about was how in the world could this happen.

And Jesus seems to have disappeared. Where is this man, the neighbors ask. "I don't now," says the former blind man.

*The Pharisees are next. They are the religious leaders of the day. Let's see how they reacted to the healing of the blind man. I am starting at verse 13:

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath.¹⁵Therefore 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."

¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.

¹⁷Then 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."

What did you notice? Again, no rejoicing for someone who was blind, but can now see. All they seem to care about is that Jesus broke a religious law. He healed on a Sabbath. And not healed, he worked because he dug up some dirt. Jesus is not a very good Rabbi.

*Next are the parents of the blind man. I start at verse 18:

¹⁸They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. ¹⁹"Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

²⁰"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. ²¹But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.²³That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

This is getting stranger by the moment. As a parent, wouldn't you be rejoicing that your son, who has been blind since birth, could now see! Perhaps you have seen the videos on Youtube of deaf people who get hearing implants and we watch as they hear for the first time. Or, the videos of people who are colorblind, and they put on these glasses that help them see colors for the first time. Usually the reaction of the person who can now see and hear is crying. But the fun part is watching the friends and family who come to witness the moment. They laugh and cry and rejoice with the person. Hugs all around.

Here in this story, nothing like that happens. The parents don't want anything to do with this. They are filled with fear. If they acknowledge the miracle of Jesus and admit who he is, they fear they will be thrown out of the synagogue. Cast away from their religious family.

Are you relating just a bit? Our situation is, of course, completely different, but the result is the same. We have been cast out of the sanctuary. We cannot meet or worship together.

*There's more. Things are escalating in our scripture passage. The religious leaders get more involved. I start at verse 24.

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

²⁵ He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

²⁶ Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

²⁷ He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

³⁰ The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

³⁴ To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

No one in this story sees the work of God. No one in the story rejoices when the man is healed. No one – not even the parents – express joy, wonder, gratitude, awe. When you watch those videos that I talked about on Youtube, the people witnessing the miracle of seeing color or hearing, go bonkers and can’t stop asking questions: Can you hear me? What do you see? What is it like? How does it feel like? What color is this? Does the sun hurt your eyes? Are you happy?

The exact opposite happens in our story. What should have been a celebration deteriorated into a day of controversy, debate, fear and expulsion. The questions become: Who is this man? How can a sinner do miraculous signs? What did he do to you? How did he do it to you?

Everyone in this story saw the healing or the evidence of it, but all of them had difficulty recognizing and naming it as the work of God.

And in all of this: Where is Jesus?

Let’s keep reading. I start at verse 35:

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.

What I love about this story is while as all of this is going on... the neighborhood in chaos, things escalating....the blind man is having his own spiritual experience. At first, he didn’t know who Jesus was. He’s just a man, the blind man says when his neighbors question him. When questioned by the Pharisees, he calls Jesus a prophet.

When questioned further by the Jews, admits Jesus must be from God. When Jesus sought him out, he confessed belief in Jesus as the Son of God and Lord. This is quite a progression! He's a man....a prophet....from God....the Son of God.

As you look back on your life, can you see your spiritual progression?

*What do we do with this story in our world today?

Remember when the disciples asked why this man was blind, Jesus said it was not because of the man's sin but that Jesus would use it to reveal the work of God. What the disciples and the community understood as an occasion of judgment, distance, criticism, Jesus made a place of grace and healing.

So as our normal lives are being disrupted by this virus, how can we react? It's easy to react with anxiety, distance, criticism, panic. But can we make it, with the help of God, a time of grace and healing?

Can this anxious season become an occasion to reveal the work of God in us and among us and through us? Could this crisis, if we respond rightly, be an occasion for more radical care and greater compassion to show the love of God to those most in need of it?

If ever there was a time to come together as the church and show others the healing love of Jesus, this is it. Let us remember those who are isolated. Let us see them and ask God to reveal to us how we can extend the healing love of Jesus Christ.

Here is a story of what happened this week to one of our members. She went on Facebook and told how, due to a medical condition in the household, they were in desperate need of toilet paper. She had gone to every store to no avail. Immediately, she got responses from people on Facebook. Some were encouragement. Some were promises to pray.

And some were practical. One woman said she could drive right over and give this church member some toilet paper. She received 6 phone calls from people offering toilet paper.

And here is what happened when she was driving around looking for toilet paper. She tried the dollar store. They were out of toilet paper, but had a few boxes of tissues. She picked up a couple, and as she did so, she heard a couple women talking about the hoarders. One of the women left, and other struck up a conversation with our church member.

The stranger was a nurse. When she heard the story of our church member, she said, "I will find toilet paper for you. Give me your number, and I will call you when I do." Two days later, our church member got a phone call from the nurse. "I bought you 8 packs of toilet paper," the nurse said. "I will deliver it, and I won't take any money for it."

The church member baked the nurse some banana bread as a thank you.

*So take a breath and remember that God works in the midst of suffering, fear, and the inability to know what next week will bring. Be flexible. See the people around you. Be creative in extended God's love while still following the guidelines of safety.

May the peace of Christ be with you and may God use this crisis as an occasion to bring us closer, and increase our care for each other.

We love you and miss you and pray for you. Amen.