

Sermon: **Seeing Jesus**

Text: John 9:1-41

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The story tells of a man blind from birth who is now able to see. But the real meaning of the story is about us and our ability, or inability, to see spiritually. It's about our spiritual perception and perspective.

John's account of the actual restoration of the blind man's sight is told in a matter-of-fact manner, in just two verses.

"Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam. Then he went and washed and came back able to see'".

That may seem like a strange procedure, but apparently it was one that many of the contemporary healers or would-be-healers used. But simply put: the man was "able to see". That was the reality.

When people asked him how he had received his sight he simply said: "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." He is then barraged by nay-sayers and intimidated by people of power. He is drilled with questions about Jesus and who he is and how this all could be. The man answers, "I can't give you the kind of answers you're looking for about who this man Jesus really is. I don't know where he is. I don't know whether or not he's a sinner. One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see. Period."

This story as John presents it, is central to the whole of his Gospel writing. He shows Jesus to be in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Messiah.

"On that day the deaf shall hear the words of the scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped."

John incases this story between two statements of Jesus. Just before restoring this man's sight, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." At the end of the story he concludes by saying, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."

There's a much bigger story here than simply an account of how a man's physical sight was restored. To repeat: This story tells of a man blind from birth, who is now able to see. But the real meaning of the story is about us, and our ability or inability to see spiritually. It's about our spiritual perception and perspective.

The real story takes place back in the neighborhood in the reaction of the neighbors, the religious leaders and the man's parents. Here's a man who was blind from birth and is now able to see. But they can't see that. His eyes are opened, but their eyes are slammed shut. And they're having all kinds of problems with this. "How can this be? Well, it can't be! We just can't see it, so it just can't be!"

In a book he co-authored with N.T. Wright entitled *The Meaning of Jesus*, Marcus Borg does a nice job of describing how we "see" Jesus, or how we have trouble "seeing" Jesus, in terms of our perceptions of who he really is and our perspective relationally. He notes that our worldview is a major factor in how we see Jesus. Our worldview is our basic image of what is, what is real and what is possible.

Borg says that according to a purely secular worldview, there is only "this", i.e. what is visible and what we experience. But according to a religious worldview there is "this" and "more

than this". A religious worldview entertains the reality and mystery of God and the sacred. This view sees beyond "this" to include spiritual perception and perspective. He says, "I am convinced that the sacred is real. I see reality as far more mysterious than the modern worldview affirms. And that makes it possible for me to take God seriously."

So as we come back to our Gospel lesson, we must ask; who are the blind ones? We should also ask ourselves; how do we see all this?

Here's a man who is able to see, looking at folks all around him who can't see the reality of this, and more importantly, the reality of Jesus. Quite frankly, it would be a lot easier for a lot of people, then and now, if this guy were still sitting blind and begging, selling pencils or whatever he had been doing.

You see, if his sight is real, it messes with their grasp of reality. But if it is bogus, then their theological theories and their scientific certainties and their religious structures and strictures are all still intact and they can still be in control of their own vision, and their vision can still control their own reality. If this man's sight is bogus, then Jesus is only another ordinary man who has no higher authority or claim and he can be discounted. That's what is really going on here.

Back in the neighborhood, the neighbors can't see it. They're saying, "You can't see. It just can't be. We know you; we've know you since you were a baby. You're blind. If you can see, then it can't be you. It must be someone who looks like you. That's the way see it. That's our perspective. That's what we believe."

The Pharisees, the religious leaders, can't see it. They're saying, "You can't see. It just can't be. This Jesus can't be of God because he did this on the Sabbath. So this whole thing is invalid. It's illegal. So whatever you say, it doesn't count because it doesn't fit our moral rules and legal codes. So it isn't reality. That's how we see it. That's our perspective. That's what we believe."

So they consult with the man's parents. Maybe he really wasn't blind from birth. His parents are intimidated and afraid to acknowledge what they surely are able to see because they don't want to be excommunicated from the Synagogue and be socially ostracized. "He's our son; yes. He was born blind; yes; fact. But how it is that he can see? You'll have to ask him. He's of age."

The Pharisees call the man back a second time. They still can't see it. Still they're saying, "It just can't be that you can see. We know this because this Jesus is a sinner. He breaks the Sabbath laws. So, come on son, fess up; what's really going on here?"

The man replies, "Look, I can't tell you what you want to hear. All I know is that I was blind. Believe me, that I remember. And now I can see. I'm standing here looking at you. I can see your long robes and the vexation on your faces. What more can I say?"

But they keep going over the same questions. Exasperated, the man responds, "What do you want me to do, change my answers? Or could it be that the reason you keep asking these same question is because you are really interested to know more about Jesus because you want to be his disciples?"

That really made them mad. "You're a sinner, completely unschooled in the ways of God so your testimony is discredited. And this Jesus, who does not go by the book of Moses is thereby disqualified. So none of this is valid. That's how we see it, and that's the end of it."

Then this unschooled, unwashed, unlettered beggar, this seller of pencils, sums it up in a very astute way.

"Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

"So", he might have gone on, "what is your problem? Why can't you see that? You have to be blind to miss that. You can see that I can see, but you are blind to the one who gave me my sight."

They threw him out of the Synagogue.

Jesus came back and said to the man. "Do you believe in the Son of God?" He replied, "Well, who is he?" Jesus said, "You have seen him. It's me, speaking to you now, even the one who gave you your sight.

And the man gets it. "I see. And... I see! Yes, now I really do see, and I believe. You are the Son of God!" And he worshiped him.

Jesus says. "That is why I came... so that those who do not see, may see.

How do you see all this?

Can you see Jesus?

Do you believe him?

Amen.