

“Spiritual Enlightenment”

John 9:1-41

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John 9:1-41 NRSV

“As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of God who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When Jesus had said this, he 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” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.” They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.” The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” 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?” Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” The man answered, “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 God does listen to one who worships God and obeys God’s 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.” They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to Jesus, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

On a blustery cold Minnesota morning a man got into a hot shower to warm up. He was startled by pounding on the front door and heard the person scream out, “blind lady”. Oh no, he thought, this poor blind lady must have lost her way and is freezing out in the cold. He raced from the shower to the front door in the buff. No need to waste time putting on clothes for the lady is blind and freezing. He opens the door and the lady instantly shields her eyes and exclaims, “I can see why your wife ordered blackout blinds for all the windows.”

There are many different forms of blindness. Everyone sees and interprets matters differently from their unique perspectives. Many times, one’s perception is quite skewed from reality. Bruce Prewer wrote, “Some people have excellent eyesight but do not see further than their noses. Some have good vision yet choose to see only a little of the way, the truth and the life. And some have no physical sight yet see brilliantly along the path of Christ.”

Our scripture contrasts two ways of journeying through life. In the blind man’s journey from physical blindness to spiritual sight, we see someone develop a relationship with Jesus, the light, and is enlightened receiving new life. In the religious leader’s journey from physical sight to spiritual blindness, we see them close themselves to Jesus, the light, become blind, and stumble around in spiritual darkness.

Biblical Scholar Gail O’Day concludes, “The key question for the gospel of John is; do you see God? Jesus the living word, God incarnate, the light of the world has come into the world so we can see God, experience God’s love, and be enlightened. Jesus brings a critical moment of decision to every person. Jesus is offering salvation, God’s love, and enlightenment. In John’s gospel, good and evil are defined solely by one’s response to Jesus. The good are those who come to the light, who develop a relationship with Jesus; the evil are those who scorn the light and reject Jesus. Sin is defined not by what one does, but exclusively by one’s relationship to Jesus. Jesus takes away the sin of the world by giving everyone access to God. Jesus takes away the world’s sin, because he makes it possible for everyone to reestablish their relationship with God. The world’s sin is people’s refusal to believe in Jesus. This flies in the face of views that want to define sin in relation to right actions or morals, thereby establishing norms for judgment. The only way to be excluded from Jesus’ offer of salvation is to turn one’s back on Jesus. It is not the Christian community’s responsibility, just as it was not the religious leaders’, to judge anyone’s sins, because the determination of sin rests with God and is determined by faith not actions. Therefore, the religious leaders’ are blind because they rejected Jesus and the blind man has true sight and salvation because he followed Jesus.”

John Calvin believed that the primary purpose of the law is to guide us to a saving relationship with Jesus. A major stumbling block is over and over again in a multitude of ways people keep trying to find righteousness apart from Jesus; in works, or law keeping, or living a certain way. This leads to categorization, judgment, prejudice and divisions.

Theologian Paul Tillich in his essay “The Yoke of Religion” explains how religious laws demand acceptance of ideas, dogmas, doctrines, and traditions. The greatest distortion of Jesus is using Jesus to demand ritual activities, moral obedience, inhuman self control, surrender to ideas, unlimited self-negation, and unlimited self perfection. The law demands perfection. Some misuse the law to coerce others to follow their religious views. This distortion is found in the religious leaders who crucified Jesus, because Jesus broke laws, such as healing on the Sabbath. Jesus broke the burden of the law not by fleeing from the law rather by overcoming the law, fulfilling the law’s intent and purpose. Jesus offers us freedom and enlightenment.

The religious leaders were all about following the law. They asked Jesus who sinned this man or his parents? They did not love or even care for the blind man. They were trying to make a case for their own righteousness. They were trying to prove that they were better, somehow more worthy. Now Jesus could have healed this man in an instant, yet Jesus is trying to help the religious leaders see the blinding burden of the law. Jesus spits on the ground, makes mud, kneads the clay, and spreads it on the man's eyes. If Jesus would have simply healed the man, it might not have been seen as working on the Sabbath, but kneading clay like a brickmaker, like a potter, is clearly work.

The irony of our scripture is the only person that had true vision was the judged blind man. Everyone who had sight and thought they were in the right were spiritually blind. The neighbors were blinded by skepticism. The parents were blinded by fear. The religious leaders were blinded by the law. It is striking in this text how many times the religious leaders say, we know. We know Jesus is a sinner, because he healed on the Sabbath. We know a sinner cannot be from God. We know Moses. We know the law. We know God does not listen to sinners. We know you were born in sin. In reality, they are ignorant, and it is the once blind man that is

wise. He is the one constantly saying, "I do not know." I do not know where Jesus is. I do not know how I was healed. I do not know if Jesus is a sinner. When Jesus talked to the man a second time, he asked, do you believe in the Son of Man? He answered and who is he, sir? If you think you have many of the answers, then you better check your relationship with Jesus. As Christians, we should be more interested in the questions than the answers. Faith is not about having right answers. Faith is about being enlightened by questions. God does not diminish us by giving us easy answers, rather Jesus enlightens us and encourages us to grow. God is not limited by answers, rather God invites us to explore the endless glory of God and God's peace, grace and joy. Faith is about having the freedom to explore the questions and seeing that there is always much more than can be expressed in an answer.

The law, answers, judgements, divisions is like standing on a mountain top in thick fog, where you can only see yourself. As one explores the questions the fog lifts enabling one to see the stunning scenery. Seeing the awe and wonder of God's glory gives sight to gratitude, forgiveness, freedom, love and joy. As one's sight grows, they see more and more goodness in more and more people, including oneself. As one's sight grows, they become more fully alive.

The religious leaders were closed, judgmental, spiritually blind. The blind man, had spiritual sight for he was open and gracious, admitted he did not know, willing to ask questions, and eager to explore new possibilities. The religious leaders were arrogant and skeptical. The blind man was willing and imaginative. The religious leaders were fearful, self-righteous, and worshiped the law. The blind man was a seeker who discovered his righteousness in God and worshiped Jesus.

The blind man is enlightened and grows exponentially on his journey. First, the blind man sees Jesus merely as the one who sent him to the pool to wash his eyes; next, he sees Jesus as a prophet; next he sees God in Jesus. Our story ends with the once blind man worshiping Jesus as Lord, the Son of God.

All of us are born spiritually blind and remain blind until touched by the enlightening love of Jesus. We learn to love. We learn to be joyful. We learn to be gracious. Water is a symbol of spiritual enlightenment. The blind man washed the blindness from his eyes. For many the waters of baptism marks the beginning of movement from darkness to light. Amazing grace, I once was blind, but now I see.

Freeman Patterson in his book *Photography and the Art of Seeing* writes, "On those frosty mornings when I grab my camera and tripod and head out into the meadow behind the house, I quickly forget about me. I stop thinking about what I will do with the photographs or about self-fulfillment and lose myself in the sheer magic of rainbows in the grass. Letting go of self is an essential precondition to real seeing. When you let go of yourself, you abandon any preoccupations about the subject matter which might cramp you into photographing in a certain predetermined way. As long as you are worried about whether or not you will be able to make good pictures you are unlikely to take the best photographs you can. When you let go, new conceptions arise from your direct experience of the subject matter; new ideas and feelings will guide you as you make pictures."

Jesus came to give us freedom so we can let go; so, we can let come the enlightening love of God. Throughout the gospel of John people begin to see when they let go and welcome the sight giving Holy Spirit. Nicodemus let go of his misconceptions and traditions; so, he could let come a second birth of the water and the Spirit. The Samaritan Women at the well let go of the heart crushing gossip about her lifestyle, all those seemingly insurmountable barriers, let go of thinking she was nothing, undeserving; so, she could let come deep drinks of living water, worshiping Jesus in spirit and in truth. The blind man let go of his label as a sinner, the burden of religious law; so, he could let come freedom, true vision and a spiritually enlightened journey. What do you need to let go of so you can let come the living water, spiritual enlightenment, love and joy of God? Will you expand your sight by wrestling with the questions? Will you enjoy more and more abundant life with your spacious imagination that sees God? Amen